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THE ACTRESS



LOUISE CLUSSER HALE

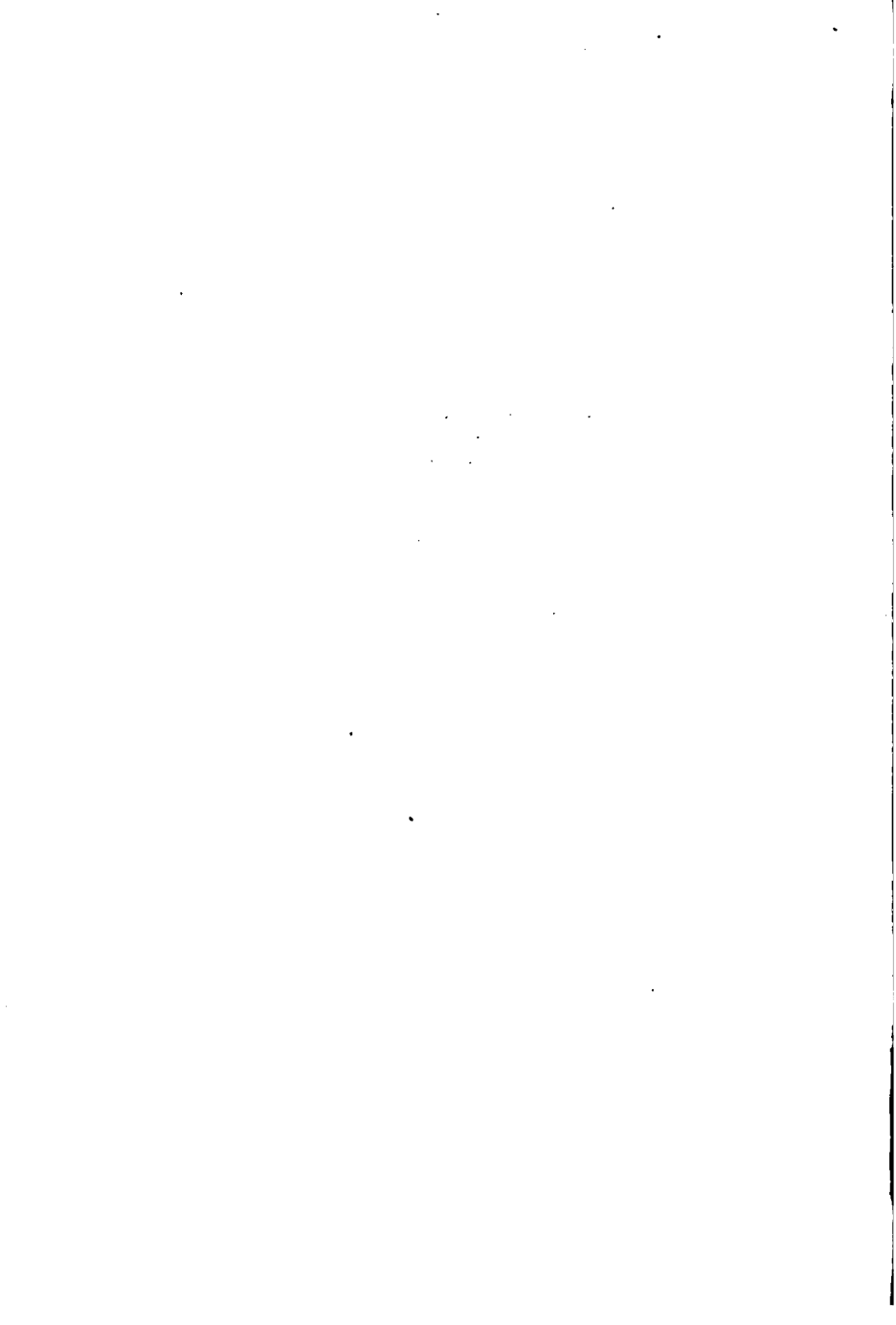


Here is another "Petitioner"
who begs for the gentle
friendship of Mr. Brooks.

Louis Clara Hale.

1909.

Hale
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[See page 107

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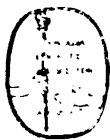
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THE ACTRESS

A Novel

BY
LOUISE CLOSSER HALE

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THE ACTRESS

A Novel

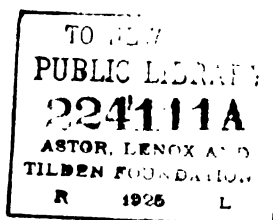
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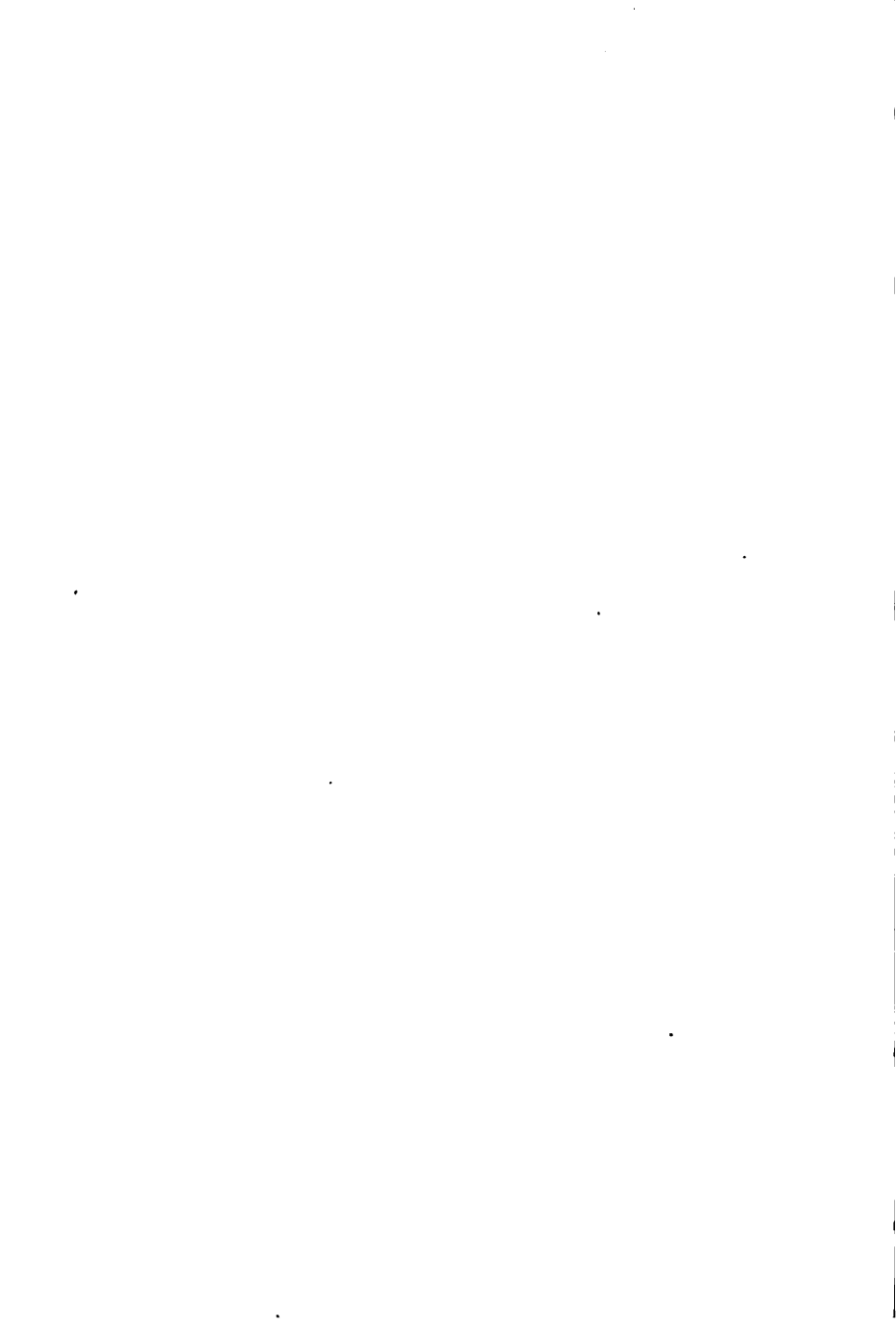
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ILLUSTRATIONS

"WE HAVE GREATLY ENJOYED THE WHOLE PLAY, MISS MILLER," THE KING SAID	<i>Frontispiece</i>
WE KEPT UP A STREAM OF CONVERSATION, AND ON ONE TOPIC ONLY—THE PLAY	<i>Facing p. 120</i>
"JANIE!" HE CRIED	" 272
I LAY IN HIS ARMS IN A BIG CHAIR, THIN . AND SHAKY AND MISERABLE AND HAPPY	" 310



THE ACTRESS

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I

I KEPT Aaron waiting last night, and we didn't get into the Moon Room at the Astor until it had almost set—meaning the moon. At least the musicians were far enough advanced in the programme to be playing “‘The Rosary,’ by request,” and all the men and women supping together were sitting back in their chairs looking dreamily at one another, which is the thing to do when “The Rosary” is being played.

Aaron, who was hungry but amiable, said he was really glad he missed the number, as he would have been the only man in the room who continued to think of the girl opposite him. The rest of the men and all of the women—this pointedly at me—were each thinking of some one else and some other occasion. “That is a way ‘The Rosary’ has,” he concluded. I laughed at

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this, and did not protest against his assertion that I was not thinking of him, as of course he hoped I would, but way down in my indifferent heart I was admiring him very much.

Next to my art, there is nothing in the world so attractive as a perfectly clean, perfectly sound New York business man in a dinner-coat. There are other types who are not to be sneered at. The professional man, with his eager, nipping air, is stimulating, and the idler, who has never done a stroke, but whose father has, is as pleasant to look upon as clothes, good sport, and one generation of leisure can make him. But I like the type that even at thirty-five has a few lines about the mouth that come from set jaws during the business hours, shrewd eyes that can be kind and terrible, square shoulders that were put to the plough when a youngster, and the well-ordered, limited speech of a man who has learned the use of his tongue in a country college and the control of it in a city office.

As it happens, this very well describes Aaron, but it just so happens. There are dozens of brokers quite as clean-shaven, with hair brushed quite as nicely, and with quite as unmanicured but well-kept hands as his, and none of them so

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pig-headed. That is his great fault—he will not see things as I see them. He would rather be rude.

“Aaron,” I said, while waiting for the clams, “I was detained to-night to talk to the stage-manager. He believes I can get a good laugh and a good hand on my last exit if I fall right through the long window backward, as though the shutters had given way. What do you think?”

“Making a monkey of yourself,” was Aaron’s only comment, as he savagely scratched a match.

Now this was not kind, but I was too accustomed to such remarks to resent them very deeply. I only looked gently reproachful.

“It’s perfectly legitimate,” I continued—“she is in a state of great excitement and backs up to the opening not knowing it is there.”

“Who catches you on the other side?” demanded my companion, suspiciously.

“How can you be so silly!” I exclaimed. “I suppose one of the stage-hands will. You can never depend on an actor, or I’d ask one of the company to look after me.”

Aaron deliberated a minute, tortured twixt Scylla and Charybdis. “Better have a stage-

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hand," he finally advised. "They're dirty, but at least they work for their living."

I was devouring the third clam by this time, and it was very cold and good, but I put down my fork and reached for my fur. Aaron forestalled me by hurriedly seizing it.

"You know perfectly well," I stormed, "that I will not have my profession abused."

"I didn't mean to abuse it," he replied, humbly, the while sitting on my fur. "But I can't hang around my club every night and think of you bouncing about like a rubber ball from one man's arms to another and keep calm."

"Then come to the theatre and see me do it," I retorted.

Aaron behaved astonishingly bad.

"Never again," he declared, flipping Tabasco sauce everywhere. "Never again. Come to the theatre to see your dear face made old and hideous, and that absurd wig dragged down over my child's eyes, and every time you show those disgusting white stockings hear a roar of laughter? If I ever get in there again I'll smash the whole audience."

"You know that when I do bounce in and out of men's arms it's all comedy," I went on. "How would you like to have me a leading

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woman making love and being made love to through every act? A character woman doesn't have that to undergo, anyway."

"Undergo," almost sneered Aaron. "I suppose you claim a stage kiss is physical and mental agony?"

It was well the band was playing "Dixie" and everybody was applauding, for I vulgarly shrieked my answer.

"I say to you now and for all, Aaron Adams, that a stage kiss is a piece of stage business like sitting down or getting up, only a little more exacting for fear one will get rouge on the other's cheek."

"Don't say 'you' when speaking to me," he replied, looking dangerous. "I'm not an actor."

When Aaron looks dangerous I get sort of weak and my hands go loose in my lap.

"Aaron, only tell me," I said, "what do you want me to talk about—what do you want me to do?" There was a break in my voice. Character women are not supposed to do these things, but I knew the trick.

Aaron poured out my ale and helped me to chicken and ham. He wasn't dangerous any more; as a motorist would say, spelling the word differently, the "brake set."

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"You know what I want. I want you to give up this work on the stage and be my wife. I want you to let me love you and shelter you, and keep you safely and warmly housed on cold, wet nights, and on days when your headaches are bad to give you the care that you deserve. Think of a little, nervous girl like you, with your pretty, tired face covered with a map of queer wrinkles, prancing about for a lot of lazy, idle humans to giggle over. I tell you, darling, there is nothing in it. And—I want you—I want you."

As his voice went husky, not from weak emotion, but from a great singleness of purpose, I turned as I had often done before and looked perplexedly into the mirror in the side of the wall. I looked at the shell of me in the glass, and I rewondered how a big, broad man could struggle so long for a small, colorless, thin girl of twenty-two—a girl who didn't want him, didn't want any one, didn't want anything except to be left alone, to always have a fair part in an agreeable company, and a dressing-room near enough to the others to borrow rouge and exchange gossip without effort. I had said some of these things to Aaron before, and I pushed away my chicken and ham preparing to say

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them all over again. I can't claim that it was altogether tiresome; talking about one's self seldom is. However, I pretended it was. My—one might say—opponent had gripped his napkin with both hands, arms down, and held it tightly across his knees ready for my invariable arguments.

“Aaron,” I began, wearily, “I’ll go back a little further than usual, and perhaps to-night you’ll see things straight. You know well that ever since I was old enough to remember anything at all I wanted to go on the stage. I couldn’t have been over six or seven when I signed all the pledges at a temperance revival, forswearing gin, tobacco, and blasphemy. It was not at all because I had religion, but because I saw that the converted ones were allowed to recite texts from the platform. I wanted to recite, too, and I did. My mother and father were already dead, and the distant relatives who brought me up were of that poor type of villagers who felt I was started on the right path, and who gladly sewed gold stars on my little white dress and taught me a verse from the Bible.

“I regret to say—and this has happened since—that I became so interested over my stars I gave small time to the text, and the result was,

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after I had climbed to the platform and met an awful mass of faces, I couldn't remember a word of it. Everything whirled around, my knees beat together, and I went through all the agonies of the stage fright which is every actor's 'first-night' companion. But, Aaron dear, I would not leave the rostrum. Other forgetful children who had given up drinking, chewing, and swearing were lifted down with bellows; but not I. I was born to the stage, and I did not intend to leave it. I believe that my verse was nothing more difficult than 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging,' and when at last, after an endless silence, a good mother who knew the power of suggestion called, 'Think of something with liquor in it,' the advice of the wise apostle hopped into my mind, and 'Take a little wine for your stomach's sake,' I shrieked, in proud relief."

Aaron tried not to laugh. I was never encouraged in my plea for the stage; but the waiter who was serving the salad sniggered, and even gallery appreciation was welcome. Somewhat elated, I went on:

"The whole point is this: instead of being even more paralyzed by the roar of laughter which went up, and swelled, and doubled until

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it resolved itself into hand-clapping, I was absolutely fascinated. Previous to that I had thought there could be no sweeter music in the world than the brass-band which escorted the minstrels along Main Street whenever they came to town, and I remember feeling vaguely how unjust it was that my sex forbid my ever wearing a silk hat and marching to a glorious quick-step. But the revival episode made me realize that there were higher ambitions, and the wave of laughter carried me out on a sea of unshaped dreams."

I stopped at this. Aaron's eyes were twinkling at my rhetoric. "'Unshaped' dreams is good," he commented. "You should have had a jelly-mould."

"I sha'n't go on," I said, "if you make fun of me."

"I don't want you to go on," he retorted. "I want you to eat some of this salad and be my wife."

"Please, no—it's too vinegary."

"What? To be my wife? Oh, little love, give a man a chance."

"I mean the lettuce, of course. And you mustn't talk that way, for the waiter can hear."

"Well, I can't talk any other way, waiter or

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no waiter. If you're so shameless as to tell your life story before him, then go ahead. I'll bet a hat he's on my side, anyway."

So I went on without minding either Aaron or the boy. "There isn't much more to tell. When I was a little older I began to know just what it was I wanted, and as I had long been granted the medal as the leading elocutionist of the village, the general opinion was that—when the time was ripe—it was only fair to the stage that it should have me."

"I suppose you call fifteen 'when the time was ripe,'" interrupted Aaron, excitedly.

"No, I don't," I admitted. "I was too young; but I had been to a high-school, my relatives wanted to move to a farm, which I didn't want, and I had an opportunity to go East with the minister."

"'East with the minister'! Oh, Lord," groaned Aaron, drinking ale rapidly.

"It was an excellent plan," I asserted, and then I put my hands to my face and laughed a little. I wouldn't bore Aaron with the details of my departure—how the town came down to see the minister and me off, and the G. A. R.'s, for whom I had recited many times, gave me a large pictorial Shakespeare. How I was so ex-

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cited I didn't feel at all like crying, and yet, seeing my relatives do it, I suddenly realized that I should, too, and, moreover, found that I could, then and there learning my first stage trick.

I did tell him, however, of my embarrassment on my first night in the sleeper, and of my kneeling down in the aisle to say my prayers with the curtains drawn so well over me that the conductor stumbled across my figure. The old man was much alarmed and thought I had fainted, and I was so shy about confessing what I was really doing that I made believe I had swooned away.

"Made believe!" echoed Aaron. "That's what your life is composed of—all of you 'making believe,' like little children. And do you still say your prayers?" he added, suddenly.

"Yes, I do," I snapped, ashamed to be ashamed.

But Aaron's eyes softened; he reached over and laid one of his warm hands on my chilly one. "Dearest," he breathed.

It was rather sweet, but I pushed back my chair to go, and Aaron crushed out his cigarette light in the tray and beckoned for the check. I put on my gloves leisurely.

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"You needn't think I'm through," I said.

"What, more supper?"

"No, more story. Gracious, Aaron, another!" as he opened his bill purse. "You never seem to have anything but hundred-dollar bills; he'll be ages getting that changed."

"Go on," said Aaron, quietly, "but my turn next."

"Well, it's just this. All through my year at the school of acting my love and veneration for the stage increased. If that school didn't do me any other good, it gave me a respect for my calling which those first miserable years of travel in cheap companies could not dissipate. There wasn't much veneration in those 'troupes,' and very little artistic endeavor, and I grew wise quickly. Why, the women used to drive me into corners to tell me vicious stories—"

"Don't," broke in Aaron, white about the mouth.

"I sha'n't," I hurried. "It didn't make any difference, anyway. I had never cherished false illusions, and later on, when I got into better companies, I found conditions even happier than I had imagined. They were the discouraged whom I went among at first, and in most instances men and women who had gone

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upon the stage without being particularly fitted for it, and without any call." Aaron wriggled here. "*I will* say it, though it makes you mad; there's just as much a call to the stage as there is to the ministry, so, Mr. Aaron, I repeat, without any call beyond a desire to parade one's self and earn a living easily."

"I wonder if they found it easy?" commented Aaron.

"No, it was hard, hard. But they had grown accustomed to the grind, and while they all reviled their work, which made me heartsick, I doubt if any one of them would have abandoned it. This acting game is so big that it saps us up and we become a part of it. Oh, I understand how it is; I really feel an integral part of the theatre now. If I married you I'd leave my right arm behind. You'd have a maimed lady to support."

The change came, and after putting on our things we walked up toward my hotel. Aaron was very quiet, so I knew he had something to say later on. The air was cool under the early April sky, the big lights of Long Acre had given place to a late moon which looked a little old-fashioned after the glowing advertisements in rainbow colors. I slipped my arm through

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Aaron's. It would be so pleasant to go on supping with him and part at my hotel door! I would not ask for any other companion at any time. Why could not men be reasonable? But Aaron was silently arguing in a different strain, and at the corner of Forty-seventh Street he stopped. He never could talk and walk both.

"What you don't take into consideration," he began, "is that love has a place all to itself; and since it rules the world, I think I am not crazy when I say it should be given first place. You can't any more compare acting with love than you can cheese with a rocking-chair."

This wasn't very romantic, but Aaron was pleased with the figure and went on, breezily:

"You'll learn it some day. It's a wonder you haven't before; but you're a dear, anæmic little thing, with small strength for other interests than this great one of yours. If your talent had run along the lines of leading business, if your sense of humor had not preserved you from such a fate and made a character woman of you instead, you would probably have been pestered by a good many men. The men, I mean, who see plays and move about sufficiently in the 'artistic' world, as I suppose you'd

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call it, to meet women of the stage. Some of them would have made the right kind of love to you and some wouldn't—don't fight me, I'm wise, too—but I don't think any of them could care more than I have cared from the first day when that amiable throat specialist introduced us in his office. He had no right to, of course, but bless him."

He paused.

"You've lost your point," I said, beginning to move on.

"No, I haven't," he protested, stopping me again. "There isn't any beginning or any end to my point. It's just this: I want you for my wife, and I'm going to have you, and I'm going to wait for you every night, though the Lord knows I feel an ass hanging around a stage-door, and I'm going to make love to you till you see things right and marry me. You're just so saturated with 'pretends'—children's 'pretends'—that you can't get a proper viewpoint."

If there's anything that makes me angry it's to have some one claim that the stage illusion affects our daily lives, that we are always "make-believers." So I said to him at the corner of Forty-seventh Street: "All right. I like to see

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you, I always like to be with you, but I say to you solemnly that the first opportunity that presents itself for me to leave New York I shall accept. You are ruining your life by this foolish pursuit, and I'm not sure but that you would ruin mine if you had your way."

Aaron and I walked on to the door of the hotel and parted in perfect silence. I hadn't the remotest idea what he was thinking of, and it was simply maddening.

II

IT is understood in the office—the hotel office—that I am never to be rung up on the telephone till the hour I am to be called. I had a hard time beating this into them, but they are fairly well trained now. Once upon a time, when I was younger, I good-naturedly dashed out of bed to talk airy nothings to some girl who had gone to sleep at ten and was ready for the day at eight. Now when I am aroused by accident I allow myself to talk in my vocal chords, and don't send my voice curving like a button-hook out over the roof of my mouth (stage trick), and the girl at the other end says, "Heavens, have I waked you up!" feeling very guilty, as she should.

With all the stuff in the papers and magazines now about the busy life of the actress, the general public have grown more conscious than they were a few years ago as to the habits of "my ain people." Still they don't know anything about it yet, and they never will, and they

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never should. I wouldn't for the world shake their belief, for instance, in the idea that a piece which is an established success has anything but continual rehearsals—they serve too excellently as an excuse for avoiding the things one doesn't want to do.

When a rehearsal call does come, however—and it generally follows a sudden visitation of the head manager, who meanly stands in the gallery and watches us tear through our lines—it always falls on the day of a particularly nice lunch at Sherry's, and telegrams have to be sent in all directions. Then the others of the luncheon convene, and Alphonse scoops up my cover, while all the nice writing-girls who are present talk of our dog's life, and put it in their column. The curious thing about it is, no matter the degree of a player, she almost never stays away from a rehearsal. She may come in late with hackneyed tales of "coal-wagon on the track" or "wasn't called," but she comes, and while she complains bitterly of missing her luncheon, the sense of discipline, which is the strongest unadmitted note in a theatre, is too powerful for her to withstand.

Once, just once, the year I first "arrived" as a Broadway favorite, I stayed away from a

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rehearsal, sent a telegram that I was ill, and had lunch at Lattard's, down in the city. It was miles from the theatre, but I gobbled my food with my head dropped between my shoulders as though I expected to be grasped by the scruff of the neck momentarily. The result was I had an attack of acute indigestion, and played that night, as the box-office speedily sent to the papers, "with the utmost heroism, although excessively ill all day." It's over now, and my spirit is broken, but I never look a scallop *en brochette* in the face without gazing apprehensively over my shoulder for the management.

The things that take an actress's time are the going to bed and the getting up. My dear old relative in the West sent me a neat plan for living when I accepted my first engagement, and it read very well. Her argument was that I could very easily be in bed and asleep by eleven-thirty, since I left the theatre by eleven, and I could then be up by eight, ready for a long, happy day darning stockings and improving my mind. In that way, she concluded, I could live to be a hundred.

This threat alone was sufficient to drive me to late hours. But, jesting apart, suppose, we'll say a broker—Aaron Adams is one, and I see

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him oftenest—suppose a broker after an exciting day on the floor, with the blood boiling in his brain and his eyes full of figures—suppose he were to go to his apartment at six, and say, “I will now have two soft-boiled eggs and be asleep by seven, so that by four I can be up, cut down a large tree, and be ready for five-o’clock breakfast.” Can you see a broker doing that?

At eleven the actor’s work is over, and he is nervously but not physically tired. The blood is in his head and he is hungry, for his dinner has been light and early. Like a true laboring man, he sits among his friends and chats awhile, then goes home, reads a bit, and prepares for sleep. He need not be supping in a fashionable restaurant—the happiest men and women I know are those who fly to their little flats, and tell me the next night how good was the cold beef of yesterday’s dinner.

It need not be even New York, although only real vagabonds like myself can assert this; but I know of at least two great stars who look upon their spring tour through New York State and New England as real playtime. “Have you found where the lunch-wagon is?” one of them used to say to me during her intense scene. And when the play was over we would go across

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the village green, with the glimmering light of the White House wagon as a beacon, and on high stools, with our feet tucked up on the rounds, devour onions with hot milk and talk "shop."

Small towns were not known to us by their Carnegie libraries and statues in the square. "Oh, that is where they make such good Western sandwiches," quotes the little star, as she looks over her route; or, "Goodness, that place again! There were black beetles in the hotel!" My dear, simple people, whatever their veneer in the cities, they are children on the road.

Having justified myself by supping late with Aaron, I must still account for my eleven o'clock morning call, for there is something slothful in sleeping from one till eleven, if one slept from then, but one does not, at least not if one is a character woman. I have often thought of my good old first days on the stage, when, because my nose seemed to be in the right place and the corners of my mouth turned up, I was cast for a pretty, fluffy ingénue, and I was able to go to bed with only a hurried laving of my face and a slap of cold cream.

Now, before I leave the theatre, there is a good twenty minutes of wig-removing, wrinkle-

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removing, eyebrow-removing, and general remodelling of my figure. When I get home I pull off my gloves, take off my blouse, and look ruefully at the traces of stain on my arm, which are to make them toil-worn, and the shadows of blue grease-paint rubbed in to hollow my neck that the cold cream and colder water of the theatre have not entirely removed. My hair all around the edges is silver-white, for strands were drawn up over my gray wig and then powdered, and after that silvered so as to give the appearance of real gray hair growing from the roots. Under my big hat and draped veil this did not show at supper, but now the hair must be carefully separated from the untouched brown and brushed vigorously. The silver powder is ruinous to hair and everything it touches, and I have to spread a paper on my toilet-table over which I lean. After that those discolored strands must be washed, and since this nightly performance is too drying, an oil is rubbed into the scalp.

Then comes a careful tubbing, with the use of pumice on the arms to remove the toil-worn stains. It reddens the skin, and a balm is applied, while a thicker cream than the one used to remove make-up is massaged into the skin

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of the face; for all through the evening that poor visage has been drawn up into a network of expressive lines, and when one is tired they are apt to remain. Last of all, in a warm wrapper, with the windows open, come a few calisthenics just to straighten the shoulders that have been bent for three hours.

These antics over, on the evening of April 3d—the morning of April 4th, rather—Rhoda Miller went to bed. She was very, very tired, but the events of the evening floated through her mind. She had lost that laugh in the second act because she had not waited; yes, the audience was slow to get the points—how strong Aaron's face was!—they might put a mattress back of the window—she really wouldn't need a man to catch her—but that was giving in to Aaron—well, why not—on the other hand, why—had Aaron ever given in to her?—what a heavy perfume!—that was the oil for the hair—would Aaron hate that, too?—it didn't really matter—it was always gone by morning—besides, this Aaron business must be stopped—why hadn't he replied to her last words?—what were her words? “The first opportunity—leave New York—shall accept”—and quite right, too—quite—

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The bell of the telephone rang frantically, and I sat up in my bed digging for my watch belligerently. True enough, it was only ten, but the bell continued to ring, and to stop the tattoo it was beating on my nerves I flew to the call.

"Who's there?" I croaked.

"Miss Miller, I can't help it," came the hurried voice of the girl at the switchboard downstairs. "It's a theatrical manager; he's on the wire now—"

"Halloo, halloo, halloo!" broke in a gruff voice. "I'll explain to Miss Miller—Miss Miller?"

"Yes," I answered, removing the croak from my voice with great dexterity. "Who is this?"

"This is the office of Junius Cutting. Mr. Cutting wants to see you this morning, but right away, please."

"Well, I'd like to wash my face."

The man laughed, and I heard him repeat my scintillation, and then, after a pause, "Mr. Cutting says to have some breakfast, too, but don't stop to read *The Telegraph*."

"All right, I'll be down," I answered.

There was a grunt of good-bye from both of us, and I dashed in and out of my cold tub, then

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ordered up my breakfast, with a comb in one hand and receiver in the other, and dressed between mouthfuls. The gentle April sun was stealing through the open windows, its color filling me with a warmth that its rays would not substantiate. Or was it the rosy glow of success that set my blood bounding?

After all, how nice it was to be a character woman! A leading lady could never have jested over the telephone with the firm of Junius Cutting; it would have been undignified. Even a few years ago, in my humble capacity as an interpreter of "character bits," I would have quaked out nothing more humorous than "Yes, sir, I'll be down." But that was before chance had thrust me into a rôle which read badly, hence was given to me, and played well—thanks to its fitting my humble limitations—a rôle that had caught the fancy of jaded New York and quadrupled my salary within a year.

I would like to believe that these opportunities come to every actress; they do to many, and some let them slip by. But they don't to all, and as I drank my cup of coffee and nibbled at the toast, I thanked the maker of good parts that my first years when I was so miserably learning were so

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beautifully followed by these last three happy ones.

I wore my second-best furs to go to the office, and paid small attention to my hair. I took a fierce delight in this, for it would necessitate years of such carelessness of detail to make up for the weary hours I primped in other days before I dared present myself, tremblingly, before the managers. Oh, that sad furbishing up of old costumes to make myself smart for the ogres! The close inspection of the shops to find a fresh veil that was not too expensive, gloves that looked well but cost little, bargain shoes that would peep out attractively from under well-brushed but well-worn skirts! As long as such memories remain in one's mind a woman runs small chance of that enveloping disease—"The big head."

Once in the office comparisons again thrust themselves upon me. I slipped in quietly, for already the outer room was filled with actors and actresses, singers, dancers, and eager young playwrights. There were not chairs for all, and some were leaning against the walls, draping the steam-heater, or sitting on the window-sill. The girls looked anxious, and tried to hide it—as I had often done; the men read

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papers and assumed a jauntiness which they did not feel. The office boy, recognizing me, said he would take in my card; and, seeing that this must be the proper thing to do, a young woman offered hers also, but he passed it by scornfully.

I blushed apologetically. "I have an appointment," I explained. There was a vaingloriousness about the word appointment, however, which made me even more unhappy. Once I was that girl and would devour with eyes of hate those others who had appointments. Of course I could not tell her that, or assure her that some day she would probably have such things, too, and pass in ahead of me—ahead of all of us who were just then in demand.

The door of the manager's office opened and a scared young man shot out. As he had gone into the sanctum but a moment previous, while I was entering the outer room, he could not have made any great headway before he was cut short by the decisive rolling back of the managerial chair which ends all interviews. Yet there was something in his face which betokened profound relief, and a thankfulness that he had escaped not quite devoured by the one keen, measuring glance of Junius Cutting.

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The manager looked out of his door, and there was a movement among those waiting. The actress who was evidently "next" advanced toward him, but he looked through her with unseeing eyes.

"Will you come in, Miss Miller," he called, and, uttering an apology for any one in the room who cared to accept it, I made my exit.

In the revolving-chair the ogre again became a genial, smiling man. On the top of his desk was a roll of leather-framed photographs—one of his wife, one of the baby in overalls, and one without them; and there was still another of himself at his farm surrounded by a group of friends, for he was a prince of hosts, a devoted husband, and as soft-hearted a father as was ever bullied by a small son.

"Got a two weeks' clause with your people?" he began, briskly.

By this question Mr. Cutting meant had I signed a contract with my present management which permitted me to give them, or inversely, two weeks' notice that I desired to leave the cast. It is a customary clause of all theatrical contracts, except those of a few poor managements who reserve that blessed privilege for

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themselves alone. Since there is no equity in such an arrangement, however, any actor could successfully take his case to court, yet this he seldom does for fear of prejudicing other managers against him—which is truly pitiful and pitifully true.

One's first contract seems to be a document of tremendous importance; but, after all, it is the form that every member of the company must sign, and as time goes on it loses in our esteem. As we climb a little higher up the ladder, clauses are written in for us which adds to our importance and pleases our vanity. Then comes a period—before we arrive at starship, when a special contract is made out with red seals and lawyers all over the place—a delightful period of no contracts at all; we shake hands with the management when we go in and when we go out, and every one is on his honor to behave himself and to play fair. I had arrived at the stage of no contract, and told Mr. Cutting so.

"Humph!" said Cutting, thinking better and better of me, but concealing it. "Still, I'm good friends with the Fullers, and I suppose they'd let you off."

"I'm very comfortable where I am," I re-

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plied, dying to know what was up, but also concealing it.

Junius bit off the end of a cigar. "Don't suppose a big part in London would attract you, then?"

A big part in London! The red roses in the carpet came up before my distorted vision and wreathed themselves around the head of Junius. His wife waved dizzily from her frame. I wanted to clutch my chair for fear I'd fall off of it the next time I whirled about the room, but I forbade myself to express the smallest emotion. A big part in London! It was the zenith of my ambition, and yet it was not the accomplishment of my desire that was whirling around in my mind with the red-carpet roses and the manager's wife, but my insistent phrase of the night before, "The first opportunity that presents itself for me to leave New York I shall accept." It had come—with no planning of mine, affairs had shaped themselves to the right end. It must be the right end or it would not have come, I argued, inwardly. Of course I was glad, very glad. All this happened in an instant, I suppose, and I found myself saying to Mr. Cutting:

"I like to play a big part anywhere, and I'm

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pleased that you want me; still, this piece I'm in is apt to run on all summer, and I suppose that the other would be a risk. May I ask what your play is?"

"A new one of Hallam's. The scenes are laid in America; some of the characters English, but most of them Western, so we want to get good types. Your part is the best of all, an ugly old half-breed, perfectly hideous creature—a delightful thing to play. Any one could make a hit in it." This last he added absently, which showed that the fight was on.

"I have no doubt Mr. Fuller will release me," I said, "especially if you make it a point and I am bettering myself in every way." *Every way* was slightly emphasized.

"You will undoubtedly better yourself," responded Mr. Cutting; "it's the chance of a lifetime. Of course, as regards salary—" Junius hesitated.

"Oh yes, salary," I echoed, as though it were a new thought.

"Well, salaries are not the same in London as in New York, but you can live more cheaply, and have a nice summer, too."

"Perhaps."

"It's a risk, but then everything's a risk."

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Your play might fall as flat as a burst balloon on the first hot day." And there he was right.

"It won't for two months, anyway," I persisted. "I think Mr. Fuller would guarantee me that."

"I'd like to see you try him," chuckled Mr. Cutting.

"Shall I?" I dared.

"Do as you please. I can't guarantee anything but your passage there and back, two weeks' notice, and a fair salary—a big one for London."

"I want just what I'm getting now, and you can ask Mr. Fuller what it is—one hundred and fifty dollars weekly."

I didn't get any further, for Junius revolved in his chair and laughed.

"Gracious, girl, that's a prince's ransom in London!"

"Well, it's mine, too; and, more than that, I want six weeks' guarantee. It's only fair—"

But the manager cut me short again, and for fifteen minutes by polite negation each assured the other how indifferent he was to the engagement. It finally ended in my conceding a point, as I had intended to do, and in his conceding a

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point, as he had intended to do, for I was to receive the same salary, but no guarantee beyond the usual two weeks' notice.

It really was an excellent summer's engagement, and yet somehow, as I passed through the outer room after shaking hands cordially with Junius Cutting, I was feeling rather sorry for myself, sorrier even for myself than for all those waiting ones who were not driven from their dear country through the persistent attentions of Aaron Adams. With this grievance in my mind, as soon as I had talked—and wept—a little in Mr. Fuller's office, and had finally been honorably released, I went straight to the telephone to tell that man what he had forced me into.

I didn't tell him, however. The element of suspense is so interesting, and, besides, I wanted to be on hand to see how he'd "take it." So I just said that I wished to see him.

"Well, I'm glad of that," was the response; "you don't often confess as much. I hope you are going to say you're sorry for your outrageous behavior of last night."

"I'm not," I called back, looking coquettish over the 'phone, yet realizing how absurd I must be to those peering through the glass of the

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booth. "But I'll give you luncheon, if that will help matters."

By giving Aaron luncheon it meant that I would pick out a place and he would pay the bill. As a rule, I don't lunch at all, but have a hearty breakfast at twelve and my early dinner at about five-thirty. So, in a way, luncheon was a mark of favor; besides, I was hungry.

"Luncheon, eh?" came back in rather pleased metallics. "Then you were up early! Did you get the worm?"

"Rather," I answered, mindful of Cutting.

"Did he squirm?"

"Oh, did he!"

"Poor devil!" cried Aaron, uncomprehending as yet, and a trifle jealous. "Now you'll use him as bait for me, I suppose, and dangle him before me."

"Please don't; I'm so hungry. I don't mean bait makes me so—but where can we go?"

"Why don't you come down-town. I'll meet you at the Subway, and we can have a meal in peace without masticating to music."

We had done this before, so arrangements were easily completed. Indeed, I was flying out of the booth when the girl at the switch-board cried out, "He's calling you again, miss,"

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and that brought me back, she and I both with the receivers to our ears.

"Yes, I'm here—what?"

"Oh, just by-the-way—will you be my wife?"

"Aaron, how can you? The girl is listening."

"Well, I'm not ashamed of it."

"You don't have to face her."

"Is she so dreadful?"

"Ssh!"

"But will you?"

"No."

"All right, come on down, anyway, and I'll poison the soup."

"I don't want soup."

"Great Scott! How British in our humor to-day!"

"British—hah! You just wait—wait." And I hung up the receiver.

"Double charge, please," said the telephone girl, haughtily and very pink in the face. I rushed on to the station.

Somehow I didn't find it easy to tell him on the way to the restaurant. I kept looking up from under the wide brim of my second-best hat, and thinking how well he fitted in with the big buildings and the narrow, busy streets. He

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swung along with an air of proprietorship which rather extended itself to me. But I didn't mind, for my freedom was in sight. However, it was not until the little *tournedos* were brought on that I found an opportunity. It wasn't much of an opportunity, but I made it so.

"This is good beef," said Aaron, plastering his with Bearnaise sauce.

"Our best beef goes to England, doesn't it?" I began, very artfully, and disgusted to find my heart beating. The result was not everything I could wish.

"It certainly does not," he responded, vigorously. "The best of no American product goes out of America. It doesn't need to."

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," I said, feebly fishing for another opening.

"Oh, well, don't take it to heart, dear; the beef doesn't mind."

"But I do," I almost tearfully insisted.

Aaron put down his knife and paused, eying me tenderly but anxiously. He knew my habits perfectly, and yet— "You haven't had a cock-tail, have you, Rhoda?"

This was most trying.

"You know I never drink anything but ale, and that at night. How can you be so stupid!"

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"Stupid?" echoed the astonished Aaron.

"Yes, stupid!" I snapped out. "You ought to see that I'm in trouble."

"Trouble!" he cried, all on my side at once.

"No, not that exactly," I stammered. Heavens, to call my liberation trouble! "But it's something that is going to make a great change in my affairs, however, and—"

"Rhoda Miller," interrupted Aaron, man of business to the fore, "have you put money in that Foreign Beef Trust?"

I put my hands to my face and shook, and my companion came around to my side of the table and took them down. That's the nice part of Aaron's French restaurant—when we go for late lunch no one is there, and if we go into the last room the waiter closes the door; and while he never does anything so outrageous as to knock, he hurls himself against it once or twice when he comes in with the tray. We often laughed over it, and since this particular broker of mine is an old patron, I accused him once of having given François more reason for so hurling himself in the days before I knew him. And at this he only laughed again, which proved that he was either truthful or crafty, or both. Anyway, he pulled down my hands

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and managed to keep hold of them while he dexterously drew up a chair.

"What's the matter, dear?"

"I'm going to England," I gulped, forlornly.

"For a vacation? Good!"

"No, to play; to stay there forever—at least to stay until you forget me. It's my opportunity, and I—I've seized it."

When I went to bed that night I remembered I had been so busy with the lump in my throat that I had not watched particularly how Aaron had "taken it," and it was annoying after going to such trouble in order to be on the spot with the news. I recalled, however, that he still held my hands and looked into my face. "Dear little love," he had said, simply, "poor little love."

Later on, after what I can conscientiously call pulling himself together, he went back to his *tournedos*. "You may make me miserable," he said, as he renewed his attack upon it, "but, thank God, you can't take my appetite from me."

Then there was a lot of talk to follow which made me even more set, and by the time he had lighted his cigarette he had just one more "last alternative" to suggest.

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"Rhoda," he said, earnestly, "if you are really going out of your own country, and giving up what you call a 'pleasant and profitable engagement' here in order to get away from me, I'll pledge you my word of honor that you can stay on in New York unmolested. I'll be within call, as you know, but I shall never see you."

This was making things very difficult. Visions of dreary evenings rose up before me, of lonely suppers in my room or with chance acquaintances, and all the time right within reaching distance Aaron Adams and the pleasant hour of easy talk after the play. Besides, there was London, and the chance of playing a good rôle in that Mecca of all actors, of adding to my reputation, of being admired—and envied—of seeing new conditions in the stage life to which I was so devoted. My questioner saw my hesitation, and, being a man without vanity, attributed none of it to himself.

"You have answered me," he went on; "you want to go. You've seized the 'opportunity' that you spoke of last night, because it suits your convenience. That's your excuse, not your reason. You're just enjoying one of your pretends; but let me tell you, little girl, don't imagine you'll be married to your art; there's

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only one thing a woman can be married to, and that's a man. They're not synonymous, my love and your art, and don't you forget it."

For once I had no reply; I could only look grieved; and Aaron, quite oblivious to it, bundled me up in my second-best wraps. François took the flowers out of the vase, which always managed to be there before we arrived, wiped the stems, and handed them to me. The cashier nodded as we passed by her, and the proprietor bowed at the door.

"I'm going to put you in a hansom and let you drive up-town to have some air," said Aaron, when we had reached the pavement. "I must get back to the office."

"I shall see you to-night?" I asked, leaning out of the cab.

"Yes, and every night until—"

The horse started up suddenly, and Aaron's speech was never finished.

"After all," I thought, as I lifted Aaron's tulips from my lap and inhaled the fresh spring odor, "I shall miss him, and that's no pretend at all."

III

JUNIUS CUTTING asked me not to make known my engagement until he was ready to publish his cast, so I told no one beyond Aaron and my dresser—that is, not outright. I had quite a struggle with my conscience before I told Frederica. She was not my dresser, but one of the best friends a girl ever had. She cannot act much, but then she is quite pretty, and always wanted to go to London, only she never could save up enough money. Once she saved forty dollars and sent it to her father to invest, but before the money-order reached him she had wired for it. She came to the conclusion that she might just as well enjoy herself while she was alive, and I was, in a way, responsible for this decision of hers. I had been the entire winter before saving two hundred dollars over and above what I would need for my summer expenses, and I took that down to a Wall Street office where I had learned they did wonderful things with money. Frederica

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went with me, and she heard me tell the man that I was a poor girl, and that unless the goldmine was a very good one I didn't want him to take the two hundred. He said it was one of the deepest mines in the world, and it must have been, for the sum I put into it has never come to the surface yet.

Still, I enjoy my papers and carry them everywhere. Once I was offered a penny a share—I had paid five dollars—but I took them out and rustled them lovingly and decided to keep them for their good looks. Frederica was very scornful of this decision. She said she would rather have had the forty cents and bought a cake of French soap, but, as I have said, she is never able to save any money, and no one should follow her advice. It was my custom to carry my money to Aaron, and he had made me take out a large endowment policy as well, so as to force me into saving, and also to pay weekly into a co-operative bank which he said would keep all the money if I fell behind. And though this was probably not the truth, I would fly down and pay weeks in advance whenever he mentioned the subject.

To go back to Frederica, she had been all season without an engagement, living on a

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small allowance her father sent her. He didn't mind this; he said he only had to economize when she began working. Then she had to have a maid and cabs, for, although a large, healthy girl, she was deadly afraid to go out at night. In short, Frederica was in no way intended for the stage except that her sweetness made it a much better place for the rest of us while she was around.

As she lived next door to my theatre, she ran in almost every evening without the aid of messenger-boys. I pretended to the stage doorman that she came to massage my face, which was an awful fib, and he knew it, but that and my twenty-five cents weekly passed her through. At least she came unattended, without sign of wealth. Once Hester Bateman, a girl friend of mine who has a great deal of money, begged, as they all do, to go behind the scenes—"back on the stage" is what we say. So I told the doorman that my seamstress was coming to fix a gown and to send her up-stairs. When I came off from that act I saw him eying me suspiciously. "Has the sewing-woman come?" I asked. "Yes," he snarled, "and brought her footman." And there was James by the door, white breeches, cockade, and all.

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Being in the dressing-room, Frederica was really obliged to hear about my engagement. I wanted to give Maggie fair warning, so that she could get some one else to dress. Maggie burst into tears when she heard the news, and said she "hoped to God I'd make a hit." Theatrical dressers are a type all to themselves. They are not exactly maids, for they are often the relatives of the stage-hands in the theatre, and a stage hand is—feels himself, at least—several degrees higher than the actor. These girls will do a hundred things for you that a lady's maid would never do, and call you "Honey" while they do it, and they can get you in and out of your garments with a deftness that would astonish a Frenchwoman.

As is the actress, no matter how incapable, generally spoiled for any other walk of life after a few years on the stage, so is the dresser fit only, and only content to be what she is. She likes the reflection of the lime-light, the joys and successes of those she waits upon, and the giggling gossip with the working crew; and, feeling as I do about the theatre, I should prefer it myself to any other kind of service.

Frederica did not know the truth until the end of the second act—at least I kept most of

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it back. Then I sat down for my long wait and began to make up my hands. I wore gloves during the first act, and only had to rouge my wrists to make them look chapped, and color the end of the finger that sticks out through a rip. I had a dreadful time getting shabby-looking gloves, nor could they be up to date in appearance, and whenever I found old-fashioned ones I bought a lot and made Maggie wear them around the dressing-room—which she hated. But at the beginning of the second act I stained my arms at the elbow, and after that was dry put grease-paint over the nails to take off the shine, and painted blue veins on the hands and up the arms.

Frederica had just finished telling me what a good thing it would be for Junius Cutting if he would engage her, too, because she could live with an aunt in London and wouldn't need much salary, when Mr. Charles Benny came loafing in for his evening call.

Mr. Benny is a comedian, as his name fortunately suggests. He is little and dried-up, and so funny playing just himself that there have been moments on the scene when I could scarcely look at him without laughing. His whole personality exudes humor, and if he could sus-

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tain a long rôle he would be a great comedian, but he can't. He is known as an excellent "bit actor"; he dashes off and on the stage, and the audience screams at him, but in a long scene his cheery little self becomes entirely swamped by those around him. As he rarely gets a big part, however, and is wise enough never to attempt to be anything but Mr. Benny, the theatre-going public do not realize that they are listening to a man who at the time of his first appearance probably reached his highest mark.

We had no sooner looked at Mr. Benny than we looked at each other, the same thought undoubtedly in our minds, and Frederica said, solemnly, "Rhoda, it's your duty."

You see we both felt what an excellent type Mr. Benny was, and how nice it would be to have him go along to cheer us up, for he was not a noisy comedian, giving "sidewalk performances," but just a kindly old fellow with shrewd eyes and no grammar. I hesitated, however.

"I don't think it would be right," I said. "I gave my word."

"Well, I didn't," said Frederica, "so I'll tell him."

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"But I confided in you," I persisted.

"No, you didn't, Miss Miller," burst in Maggie, very eager also. "Miss Frederica overheard you telling me."

"Well, then, Maggie," I concluded, "you go down-stairs and listen for my cue. Give me plenty of time; better come back when the minister exits."

So Maggie went away very reluctantly, and Frederica told him the news, advising him to go right around to Cutting in the morning. "I'm engaged," said she, which proves that her finest qualification for the stage was her imagination.

"Gee! I'd like to get it," said Mr. Benny. "Was the parts good?"

Here I had to confess that, although a lady of some importance, I had not been offered the script, and, indeed, had been so excited over this sudden uprooting of my be-Aaroned life that I had forgotten to ask for it.

"Hallam would probably object, anyway," I assured them, trying to placate my conscience for a bad business move. "Since he has acquired a reputation for writing good parts, he resents the actors' opinions as to their being suited to them. There'll be a reading of the

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play in three days, and I'm to call in for my part to-morrow."

"Geel! I wish it was morning," said Mr. Benny, rising from his chair and carefully hiding an old pipe from the fireman as he came along. "Can't seem to wait."

"Nor I," said Frederica, suddenly remembering that there were other things to do before she pasted steamship labels on her trunk.

I went on down, always a little nervous when out of hearing of the stage, and found Maggie moving away from a knot of stage-hands. They saluted me with a new respect, formed other groups, occasionally reinforced by an enquiring member of the company, and by the time the play was over it was generally understood that Frederica, Mr. Benny, and myself were going to London.

And they really were engaged! I met Mr. Benny on the corner of Thirty-ninth Street as I went down for my part the next morning, and he was beaming from ear to ear.

"I was there at nine o'clock," he began, "but I didn't have a chanst to say a word. Cutting, the minute he cum in, cut a swath with a sweep of his eyes around the room that made us all jump, and when they lit on me he

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just said, 'Cum in, you.' 'Tain't much of a part, but he's goin' t' let me do what I please with it." (This with a delicious, conscious pride.) "I like him; seems a nice fellah."

We all of us like managers when they engage us, and hate them when they don't. I was glad Mr. Benny was going, and yet it made me sad, for I couldn't bear to see the little man who had come from a family of acrobats and had spent most of his life in poor companies playing in London. I wondered if Mr. Benny would thank me as profoundly later on as he did then.

At Thirty-eighth Street I met Frederica. She was asking a policeman the way up-town, and seemed to have lost her wits hopelessly.

"It's all right, dear," as she greeted me. "He said he needed a handsome woman who was an American to lead the dance-hall girls and understudy as well, but he couldn't possibly pay over twenty-five dollars. Of course I said I'd go for less gladly—"

"Frederica, you didn't!"

"Yes, I did. There were a dozen far better-looking girls in the outer office, and I was afraid he'd see them before he settled with me; but don't rave, dear, I did bargain with him a little."

"How?" I demanded, bluntly.

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"Well, after I said that he replied that if I would go for ten dollars a week, just to get the trip over and see the city, that he believed he could settle the matter then and there."

"And you accepted?" I shrieked.

"Give me time, dear," retorted my friend, triumphantly. "I said that would be impossible—quite impossible—but that I would accept fifteen."

"And you are going for that ridiculous sum?"

Frederica looked uncomfortable.

"Well, not exactly, Rhoda. Somehow he wouldn't entertain that, either, and just as he was about to roll back his chair, in that dreadful way he has of ending our hopes, I suggested a compromise. So I'm to get twelve dollars and fifty cents."

I put my head down on Frederica's shoulder—it doesn't come up any higher—and laughed—not in my sleeve, but in hers. It was a very theatrical thing to do right there on Broadway, and some people passing by in the "Seeing New York" wagon were intensely gratified, but no one else seemed to mind, which is one of the joys of the Rialto. Then I went on up to get my part.

The office-boy was clearing the room ruth-

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lessly. "Positively no more engagements made," he was saying, and I could have slapped him for his insolent manner. But until my calling is granted the place among the arts that it deserves we will continue to be despised by the underlings.

Junius Cutting wore an exhausted look. "I can't imagine how the news of this London production got about," he said, as he drew out my part from a lot of others. "I have been utterly besieged this morning."

"They all need work so," I half apologized, feeling a trifle guilty. "And you know you need actors."

"Yes, but I need plays and scenes and properties and theatres, too. I must give some time to those things. The actor doesn't seem to realize that he is only a part of the production."

And he doesn't, so I couldn't argue the matter any further with Junius, though I should have liked to ask him which would be more vital to his play—a good cast or a good pair of curtains.

I took a cab back to the house; it's not a habit with me as with Aaron, but I couldn't wait any longer to look at my part, and no one likes opening in a car those blue-bound type-written half-sheets of foolscap with which all New York

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is familiar. Of course I couldn't tell what bearing it had on the play, but the lines read well. They were short and not too many, and so written that the laugh evidently came at the end of the speech, as it should, and not in the middle of the line. Also the exits were good, to judge by the suggestion of business in the brackets, but there was a continual reference at the head of each act to a grotesque appearance, which suggested that I would have to be once more what Aaron called a "clown."

Although he disputes it, for he must see me through rose-colored spectacles, still I can lend myself very easily to an ugly make-up. My eyebrows are slight enough to grease-paint out entirely, my mouth mobile enough to twist into any shape, my nose short enough to be made into a pug or to hold a bridge of putty if I needed. Even the hollows just under my cheekbones, which he calls the softest thing about me, "womanly and pathetic," and all that sort of foolishness, serve splendidly when I want to age my face by rubbing gray into them. And, after all, even a beautiful woman, which I am not, will lose her looks if she pomades her brown, curly hair, and slicks it up into a tight knot. I once told Aaron that if he wished to contem-

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plate my future appearance, unaided by my fluffy curls, to see me just before the wig goes on.

All the same, I would rather not have been grotesque again, and I sighed a little the day the play was read to the company when I found what a lovely part the leading woman had, and thought how nice it would be to have Aaron come just once to the theatre and hear me greeted by the half-breathed wave of admiration that runs through the house when a pretty actress makes her entrance. I sternly checked this regret, even as I marvelled at it. In the first place, I loved my "line," and, in the second place, I cared very little what Aaron thought of me on or off the stage, and to mortify my flesh I supped with him that night in my very old violet gown—but fortunately it was my most becoming one.

I did not give as much time to Aaron as I or, rather, as he wished from that time on. Every morning I was up at eight, for rehearsals began at ten, and in the late afternoon, when he sometimes dropped in for his cocktail in our little hotel restaurant, I was scouring the second-hand clothing-stores for old boots and shabby gowns. I often found myself enviously staring

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at queer shawls on dirty Italian women, and from off the head of one I actually did buy an old hat.

She spoke little English, and it was some time before I could make her understand that she was going to get a beautiful new one for the article I was trying to wrest from her. A crowd collected and, as usual when not wanted, a policeman came up, which almost frightened her off, but I finally got it and left her staring transfixed at the two-dollar bill. When all my wardrobe was collected, Maggie took it to her house, and, after fumigating it, baked the batch awhile in her oven, for I dared not wear the garments as they were, nor yet wash them and thereby lose their "atmosphere."

Every moment seemed full of my new part. Even after the play—I had promised the Fullers I would stay with them until I sailed—when Aaron would take me to a quiet little place for a bite before I went home to study, I would sit with one eye politely on my host and the other studying wrinkles on the faces of those about me.

"Why don't you study my wrinkles," Aaron would complain when he saw me wandering.

"Yours are only a few firm lines," I replied,

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"They would give strength to my face, and this character is a weak half-breed."

"I'm not positive they wouldn't do," he answered, a little sadly. "I feel that I'm a map of them these days, and it sure is a weakness that has put them there."

Then for the first time of late I looked at Aaron closely, rightly, as though I had lifted a gauze mask from his face, and I found him looking tired and grave, and that his smile was only painted on the gauze. And once more out of the midst of all that rush I felt that I might be losing a great deal when I lost him, and I had to think hard of the joy of that scene in the last act, and how delicious the laugh of the house would be if I could land it just in the right place. So, having thought of these things, I realized what a wise move I was making for myself—and Aaron—and when I looked back at him the gauze mask was on again and he was lighting a cigar.

He had not bothered me in the least about marrying him—had made no reference to it since our day in the down-town restaurant—but still the flowers came. Not the kind that you order over a telephone, and that arrive, a dozen of each, with a few dead ones at the bottom,

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but boxes breathing spring fragrance and the thought of the giver. Sometimes arbutus and deep, long-stemmed violets, sometimes just little crocuses with white star flowers, again a riot of tulips or cool gardenias on beds of green. And often when I put them in the vases I would have to tell myself that a man was not necessarily eligible as a husband because he possessed all the qualifications of a florist.

I was not unappreciative, however, and I sometimes wished that Aaron could see how they made alive my hotel room.

"You ought to see them to-day," I would tell him. And Aaron would draw on the menu an elaborate design of the room that he had never seen, and we would make dots for the bowls of flowers.

"Don't you think," he would say, "that this jar of crocuses is apt to get water on your book of Gibson girls, being so close to them?"

"Aaron, I have no Gibson girls. A copy of Maeterlinck's *Wisdom and Destiny* is sure to be there, Shaw's plays—or I wouldn't be an actress—and a little thumbed volume of the Browning things that I can understand."

"But where," goes on Aaron, "if you insist

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upon putting the daffodils on the top of your desk—where will my photograph be?"

"Where it has always been," I replied; but I wouldn't tell him where.

And I really put it on my dresser behind the heart-shaped pincushion to quiet the chamber-maid. Each day when I first came it was her custom to select a photograph of one of my men friends from the mantel-piece, and, placing it in that coveted position, would wait for me to declare myself. The silent war went on; each day I would relegate her selection to its old place, until, exhausted by her guerilla method, I secured a perfectly new picture of Aaron, and a perfectly new heart-shaped frame, and put it back of the heart-shaped pincushion.

Of course Aaron had never seen my room. I was like most women of the stage, who, abhorring hotel parlors, have gone through all degrees of being made love to across a restaurant table. One gets along very well during the first stages. The pressure of the fingers as both pick up a fallen glove, a hand-clasp under the table—very shocking this—the lingering over the wraps, even the stuffing of a sleeve into a coat is an opportunity all the more delicious because the world is looking on and sees noth-

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ing. At least so the poor dears think. Advancing a bit in the love game, when it is about decided that there is such a thing as affinity after all, come the walks through the park, and the drives in the dusk up Riverside, with a halt on the viaduct ostensibly to look at the lights of the river, though they seldom get beyond the lights of each other's eyes, which are much more beautiful. I won't go any further with the lives of my stage people, for sometimes they marry and sometimes they find—"It was all a mistake, my dear; we really were not suited to each other." And of course Aaron and I were exceptions, since we had reached the cab stage with no likelihood of going beyond it.

Perhaps it was for the sake of old times that he suggested a drive around Claremont before taking me down to the boat. We were sailing at daybreak, and must sleep on board, or at least make what pretence we could of sleeping, with the engines hoisting luggage all night and jovial friends coming to say good-bye. I was as near collapse as an actress can be and still go on playing (which is saying a great deal), when the curtain rang down, and the orchestra, to the great surprise of the audience, played them out with "Auld Lang Syne," while a chorus of

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voices came swelling from the stage to be muffled by the fall of the asbestos curtain.

All through the evening our playmates had been slyly joking with Mr. Benny and me. Crape was hung over our dressing-tables, the doorman had been continually bringing in ridiculous gifts addressed to Miss Miller, London. Mr. Benny had been handed on the stage during an act a book marked, "Jokes—English Version," which proved, upon investigation, to be the pamphlet of a casket company; and our daring leading man and woman played an entire scene for our benefit with an alarming Cockney accent.

Maggie, Frederica, and I were all weeping wildly at the parting, and Mr. Benny was very intent upon swallowing his Adam's apple—"Kinda hate to go," he said. To an outsider it would have suggested a tragedy. We were all over it in fifteen minutes, and Aaron, knowing this would be the case, let me cry as loud as I pleased while the cab rolled over the wet asphalt and scrunched into the gravel of the park.

It was not easy to stop altogether. I was so tired with the packing, rehearsing, the playing, the choosing of my wardrobe, the strain of com-

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mitting lines, and the unceasing fear lest my part should prove a failure, that Aaron's broad shoulder, so temptingly near me, seemed a haven of rest. I resisted the temptation, however, one of the reasons being that I was not asked.

That was chief of the queer things about him: he was the sort of man that you—one— Well, to be honest, *I* could not sit next to him as I rolled along in the dim warmth of a cab without feeling that he was born to hold a woman in his arms, and that it was his strength, not his weakness—as though all his knowledge of stocks and puts and calls was really but a small part of him, and that as a lover he would be at his best. And yet Aaron had never tried to show me this, and I had never tried to make him, for of all the types of womanhood held in poor esteem by an actress the most despised is she who permits a man some liberties but limits them to her own desires.

Some nights as we had gone on through the darkness he had taken my hand, and, laying it on his knee, covered it with his own, but his arm had never been about me. And this last night he did not even lift my hand from my muff, but sat, bent over, with his own large ones gripped

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together, and watched the lights through the open window.

I huddled myself up in my corner, feeling very far off and alone, and yet too tired to care much. At least this was the end of things, and almost any kind of an end is better than a messy continuance. I was experiencing the relief that a girl does when she tears up pleasant old letters—reluctantly she gives them up, yet smiles at the cleared space in her desk. I was going on to new letters, business ones. And Aaron—I wondered if there would be for him the little, scented, badly spelled notes we read about. I believed not. He was through his wild oats. I was but moving out of his life for a wiser and a better-fitted woman to move in. I was very sorry for myself at this, and thought how easy it would be for me to let the tears roll down my cheeks as a pretend to Aaron that I was grieved at leaving him. But I conquered the temptation as one not beneath me, but beneath him, and instead was about to exclaim that I had forgotten my tooth-brushes, when Aaron suddenly pulled up the window, for the rain was coming in, and turned to me.

“Good-evening,” I said.

Aaron laughed. “Have you got lots of warm

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things for the boat? Warm under—er—all sorts of flannels?"

"I don't wear them."

"Dearest, you must."

"I won't!"

"A hot-water bottle?"

"Yes, but I don't wear it."

"Keep it in the berth for your feet."

"All right."

A silence.

"I'm glad little Benny goes with you; he'll look after you."

"I'll probably look after him, and Frederica, too."

"Don't let that kindly, elephantine girl sap your strength. My child needs rest."

My lips wanted to quiver at this, they really did, but I wouldn't let them.

Aaron peered out through the rain-smirched glass.

"We're almost there. Get a deck-chair on the sunny side, won't you?"

"Yes, I will."

Another silence. I found myself holding Aaron's coat-sleeve. He let me, but, "Dear little love," he said, then stared out of the window again. We were twisting our way along

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the wharf. The rain was so heavy we could not see out, and no one could see in, although the lights came sifting through.

"Is all your baggage looked after?" Even while he spoke Aaron's lips seemed to be forming other words, but he would not give them sound.

"Yes, I drove to the ship this afternoon, and Maggie took down my make-up to-night. You won't come aboard, will you?"

"I think not, then. I'll say good-bye here. Rhoda—"

Without warning Aaron took me in his arms, forced up my face, which I had hidden against his shoulder, with his strong chin, and kissed me on the lips. Through the slashing of whips, the trundling of trucks, and the shouts of the stevedores, my thoughts ran as incongruous as my surroundings while my lips were against his.

"Why, I have kissed other men before, with whom I had mistaken loneliness for love, and Aaron is nothing to me. But this force, this strength, new to me, taking my breath, my life. Taking it?—no, giving me his, rather. And to think that I—I have inspired this! Why, there is despair in this kiss, and hunger, and the depths of a good man's soul, and the height of a joy

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I have never known before—and the end of it all.”

Yes, the end of it all. Just what I had wanted ten minutes before, for the cab came to a stop, and an instant later the handle of the door was turned and opened by a steward, who found two well-controlled occupants waiting to alight.

Aaron handed me out, and I believe I thanked him for bringing me down. I am sure he wished me a good voyage; and then, under the guidance of the steward, I mounted the slippery gang-plank. I did not turn back, and evading the company, who were in the dining-saloon, went to my state-room.

“Tell them I have gone to bed,” was the word I sent down. But long into the morning I sat on the edge of my hard sofa, hat and coat still unremoved, my breath filling the cold air with little puffs of white vapor.

IV

WE were eight days on the boat, and in that time the members of our company probably met and talked with more men and women not of their world than they would in a season on the road. Though many drawing-rooms are barred to the actor in America, he is uncrushed by it, the reason being that death is sweeter to him than the necessity of entering this forbidden land.

During a girl's first few years on the stage—and of course I take the average girl when I speak in this manner—she makes an effort to seek out her school friends if she plays their cities, and she entertains them when they come to New York by giving them a peep behind the scenes if she can manage it, but little by little, if her interests are confined entirely to the stage, she slips in and out of the towns without sending her cards about, makes excuses for escaping teas, and avoids even the healthful pleasure of a day at a country club for fear of having to “meet people.”

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The old 'uns are worse; while the well-mannered young actor of the day enjoys the clubs throughout the country, and in that way makes many friends, the older generation sit in the chairs of the hotel lobby, walk about the main streets of the town, look at the periodicals in the shop windows, and return to sit in the chairs of the hotel lobby. Though facing a multitude nightly, and rubbing shoulders with thousands throughout the season, they keep as strictly to themselves as though they were a travelling family—with all the discords of a family—speaking an unknown tongue.

On the boat it was different. In the first place, after the wonderful fashion news has of getting about a liner, the word ran from mouth to mouth that a company was on board, and this intelligence, while not as alarming as though a barrel of snakes had been reported, was quite as inspiring.

“Do you know which ones are the actors?” said a woman from Michigan to me on the second day out. “I’ve never seen one,” she added, rather apologizing that she could not pick them out on sight.

So I showed her a ward politician in large checked clothes, a henna-haired lady who leads

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society in a manufacturing town, and a rather gay young man who was going into an Anglican brotherhood. "That's all I see at present," I said, gazing steadily at Frederica, who was with me. "All who can *act*, I mean."

Frederica became violent at this, so I had to hurry her away, and I felt sorry all the rest of the trip for the homely lady. But who would come up to a lawyer and ask him to point out all the other lawyers on board?

Had the lady been more experienced she could have done her own picking, and more successfully. There is no doubt about it, we are different. Even the quiet and quietly dressed ones have a stamp of their own. It may be their lack of self-consciousness or perhaps their lack of restraint, for it is our duty in life to expend our emotions, not to repress them. We are a band exempt from social law, and each actor feels in his perfect freedom that the world is his to conquer—if he gets the part.

Then, our capacity for enjoyment and, inversely, for being miserable is very great. When not entirely unhappy during rehearsal hours on board the boat we were very happy talking over our unhappiness. We sat long over our nuts and raisins in the dining-saloon

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every night, each one afraid to go off in a corner and think of his part, but we were enjoying ourselves at the time, and even the ship's doctor did not repress us as an outsider is apt to do. The ship's doctor told us his usual polite lie that this was the best crowd his table had ever seen, and we told him all the good stories we knew for him to retail on other trips—that is, Mr. Benny told him, and the leading man and myself. Frederica never could think of her story until some one else got in ahead of her, and the leading woman didn't tell stories at all, but laughed at them, with or without a point.

Her name was Bella, and she had a last name, too, but I believe she would rather be known as the leading lady—the L. L. we designated her—than any other title, for she had no higher aspiration in life than the best dressing-room in the company. I had played with her before, and had nothing at all against her except—if one can understand me—she was of the kind who passes through a door her predecessor is politely holding open for her without in turn relieving her of its pressure. Also she would play a scene conscientiously, then retire to the wings to talk in a loud voice, to the great distress of those left

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on the stage. She was warm-hearted to a degree when reminded of the necessity of being so, but she did not seek good works, as she was probably unaware that there were other difficulties in life beyond her own. Andrew Carnegie calls a type of the poverty-stricken "the submerged," and I think Bella was submerged in self, and could never rise above the engulfing waters of her own appreciation.

In the most perfect contrast to her was the wife of the leading man. Here was a woman who had started her career as an actress with some promise of success. She had reached the period, anyway, when she could walk out of an office, head high, at the mention of forty dollars a week salary and could not be induced to return under fifty dollars. Then she met Bruce Farquhar in a road company and married him in Oshkosh one Sunday. Fortunately their love for each other was not the result of propinquity and loneliness, and they started "right"—so it would be generally called—for they resolved that they should stay together even if she must sacrifice good parts. That sounds like one-sided heroism, but by practically abandoning her work it forced him into a position of breadwinner, into the necessity of providing for her,

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which is an obligation wives of the stage are very eager in their ambition to take upon themselves.

And this sometimes is the beginning of the end, for unless their love is very strong, their interests mutual, they grow accustomed to living months apart, and from once rebelling against her spirit of independence, he gradually takes it as the natural process in married life. Then come a few weeks in the summer when they are together, half acquainted, impatient of each other's weaknesses, absorbed in their own ambition, both waiting restlessly for work to begin again.

It was not so with Bruce Farquhar and, as we always called her, Bruce Farquhar's wife. She played when there was a part for her in her husband's company, and at any salary the management would offer. When there was nothing she travelled with him, and as this was an expensive proceeding they lived in moderate-priced hotels, he cutting out his cigars and she giving up silk petticoats. I often watched her watching him in those days on the boat, and sometimes watched him watching her—but not so often. There was a tranquillity about her which I could not understand, knowing what

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she had given up. For I remembered she had adored her work as I still did. This love-game was somehow growing interesting to me.

"Are you always happy?" I asked one day, as we sat in our deck-chairs nibbling ginger-snaps at tea-time.

"It's been a long time since I've cried," she answered.

I colored a little because I knew she must have seen me snivelling up on the hurricane-deck — "because my part wouldn't rehearse well," was the reason I had given.

"When was that? Do tell me. Real life is so interesting, it's growing almost as absorbing as the stage world has always been to me."

Bruce Farquhar's wife looked at me in astonishment.

"Growing absorbing," she repeated. "You imitate real life; it is your constant study, and yet you find the imitation more interesting than the reality. Does one prefer the shadow to the substance?"

I moved restlessly, and brushed my hand across my lips as though to sweep away the memory of a substance that would not become a shadow.

"It's less disquieting," I murmured.

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“Do you think so?” she said. “Why, it was the stage world, as you call it, and its vanities that afforded me my last cry—my last good cry, anyway. We were playing Savannah—that is my home—for the first time since my marriage, and I did have an awful part in that piece ‘Pandora’s Box.’ I came on and stood a minute with the others, then ran off again. And all through the act I had to keep that up, not speaking a line till the second act. Of course, I played it to be with Bruce; but how was I going to make all my friends understand that? I had hoped to slip in and out of town without being discovered; but the manager of the theatre saw my name in the advance sheets and worked it in the press, and of course the house was full of old acquaintances, all expecting me to play a nice ingenue, as I had two years before. They singled me out of all that crowd and gave me an enthusiastic reception, and just as soon as they had finished I had to make my exit without a word to say. Oh, it was dreadful! I cried then; perhaps it had been pent up for a long while; I certainly cried it all out. And, do you know, throughout the evening I almost hated Bruce!”

Her voice sank to an awed whisper, but I

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didn't see any reason for it; the very thought of that part made me hate him. However, she went on.

"He was lovely about it." She generally referred to Farquhar as "he." "We had supper with some friends afterward, and he proposed a toast 'to the best wife in the world,' then tried to explain why I was playing so small a part; only, of course, they couldn't get it straight, and will always feel that it must have been a mistake—their thinking I could act when they saw me before, I mean. But I didn't care after Bruce's toast."

I was still feeling very rebellious about it myself, yet trying to agree with her, knowing how she would take Farquhar's part and resent my not doing so also, when Bella and Lawrence Chester came up.

I don't believe I've referred to Lawrence Chester, whom as soon as you meet you call Larry. There were other members of the company besides the six I mention, but they were English, and they were so absorbed over getting home for the summer and having a "shop" in London as well, that they seldom moved from the bow of the ship after the first day out, fearing they might miss a British isle. Then, too,

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they made acquaintances among the laymen more easily than did we, and spent a good deal of time among them, for in England the drawing-room doors are open wide to actors, and many of the stars build the foundations of their popularity upon cups of afternoon tea.

Bella and Larry Chester, however, had been playing shuffle-board with a party from the West, and Bella had grown sufficiently well acquainted to tell them the parts she had played and what hotel she patronized in their town. As for Lawrence Chester, I caught him in cold blood confiding to one of his partners that he had not gone over for the play, but—and here he went through a bit of pantomime which suggested that he was going away “to forget” and that he was suffering a great deal. His partner gazed at him with much interest, agreeing to keep his secret, and then Larry caught my eye as I sat serenely on a hatch, and he looked rather uncomfortable. At our first rehearsal Larry had begged me to keep his secret, and had pleaded with Frederica to do the same at the second. Of course Frederica immediately told me, and was shocked with my indifference to his grief.

“One would think you might be the girl,”

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she said, which was rather clever of Frederica.

"The girls," you mean, I retorted, for I had known Larry Chester ever since he first bounded upon the stage.

He was a boy to whom all things came easily. Vanity sent him to the theatre and ability kept him there, though his good looks gave him his start. He hadn't a ghost of an ancestor from whom to inherit his talent, and he hadn't a scrap of brain to help him in his work. What he did well he did intuitively, and with such careless ease that it was small wonder the other actors in the company who toiled over their lines and thought out the conception of their parts were often inclined to wring his beautiful neck. While quite conscious of his winning personality, he attributed his stage successes and his conquests to luck.

"Of course our side won," he said, as he cheerily wrapped us all up in rugs. "I am so lucky if a wave washed me off this boat I know another wave would put me back." He sat down in an unoccupied chair and, after lighting a cigarette, asked if he might smoke.

"I don't know how they push those jiggers so far," complained the leading lady. "If it

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didn't take the flesh off of one's hips nothing could induce me to spend my time getting sunburned. One can grease-paint over sunburn, however, but over hips—nothing doing." Bella was rather inelegant when she was most in earnest.

"I know a girl with hips," commented young Mr. Chester, "and she wears corsets that—"

"Hush," said the L. L. Bella was of the kind who could say things herself, but would permit no one else to.

"Of course you do, Larry," I encouraged; "and she sent you heart-broken across the seas, didn't she?"

Larry looked reproachfully at me, as though I had eavesdropped. "That is not the one, anyhow," he replied; and then in a low tone intended for me, and very bitter: "Can no woman keep a secret?"

Before I could suitably respond to the boy Bruce Farquhar had joined us, sitting on the footstool of his wife's chair, while Mr. Benny, wearing a large yachting cap, although still a little squeamish, shared mine. The promenaders, getting up an appetite for dinner, smiled down at us as they passed and repassed.

"What do you suppose they talk about,

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papa?" one elderly woman was heard to remark to her husband.

"Oh, about op'ry-houses, I guess," returned papa.

And papa wasn't far from wrong. While the conversation of a group of players might begin with whales—their habits—by some magic that subject would lead up naturally and easily to the thing nearest their hearts—the gentle art of acting.

The success of the play was very near our hearts, and one that never wearied us as we discussed it. At the reading it had seemed excellent, had rehearsed even better, and this does not always happen, for a play may have literary merits yet still lack dramatic worth. But now as we were nearing England, when the daily rehearsals in the dining-saloon consisted in making ourselves as inconspicuous as possible, and repeating lines without action, the drama seemed a weird jumble of meaningless phrases, undramatic, unfunny, and, above all, very American. With wary eye for the sudden coming of the playwright, we told and retold these things to one another, all of us arguing from the standpoint of our own parts.

"What do you think about my scene with

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you in the first act, Mr. Farquhar?" queried the L. L. "Now, I think," she went on, giving him no opportunity to reply, "that it is ridiculous for me to play that scene seated on a log. The speeches are too strong to be wasted on a log like that. I should move about more."

Bella always saw the veneer of her work only, and if she had been anything but a beautiful leading lady her audience would have discovered this. As it was, her loveliness and her silver voice charmed their senses and dulled their wits.

"If you mean my scene with you," responded Farquhar—we all joyfully marked the repetition of the phrase and the sense of proprietorship it conveyed in each case—"where I am cleaning that gun, I'm afraid it won't go, anyway. You see, I'm stringing you, thinking you're a country girl, and I'm afraid the Britons may feel it rude."

"Can't they see a joke?" said Mr. Benny, nervously.

"Of course they can, as quickly as any nation," I put in, "but you know stringing—well, stringing is stringing." This was rather a lamentable start, but I warmed to my subject at the thought of my own part. "Now, I'm

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afraid of the first scene Larry and I have together, for we don't use one expression that can't be traced to some cattle or mining term. What do they know of Western slang? And what do they care?"

"Oh, it'll go all right," said young Mr. Chester. "I'm in it. It's just my luck, you know," he added, at our shriek of derision.

"Gee! I wisht I could feel that way," said Mr. Benny, looking enviously at the radiant youth. "When I hear my voice whispering out lines at those foolish rehearsals down-stairs, I just wonder why I didn't stay a acrobat. I tell you, actors have got to be on the stage to play their parts, not in a dining-room."

This was the cry of the old-timer; but we felt that he was right, or we wished to feel so at any rate, and instinctively took heart. Frederica added peace to our minds by appearing with the announcement that we were sure to make a success.

"I've put on my petticoat wrong side out for the fourth day in succession," she exclaimed, "and there are white marks on my third finger nail!"

"But that means a beau," I argued.

"Well, I haven't a beau, and I don't want

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one," returned Frederica, "and a hit's the next best thing."

"The *next* best thing?" I said, throwing off my rug and preparing for a walk. "The very, very best thing, you mean."

I looked back over my shoulder at Bruce Farquhar's wife as I said this, and she shook her head at me, slipping her hand affectionately into her husband's as she did so. And once more I instinctively drew my fingers across my lips, as though to banish a memory that was indeed a reality. Then I forced myself into a silent going over of the lines and business of the new part, while I walked briskly to and fro on the sunset side. As the sun dropped into its bed and the pink afterglow rouged our vessel like a chorus girl, I stood at the rail, and for a moment felt that the lines of a grotesque character part were hardly fitted for the scene.

"There should be some one to enjoy it with me," I murmured, yet stepped out of sight when Frederica and Mr. Benny hove into view. They were somehow not just the ones I wanted. My shadow blocked the smoking-room door, however, and Larry Chester, seeing me, came out with a Marconigram in his hand.

"It's from her," he said, endeavoring to con-

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ceal his excitement with a bored air. "She says she misses me, and she's coming over next month with a woman friend." Young Mr. Chester filliped the paper with his finger, a cloud on the horizon of his happy melancholy. "Lord," he added, "I hope she won't!"

I turned in a sudden rage that was expended upon him, though not entirely occasioned by him.

"Do you know what you *do* want, Larry Chester?" I demanded.

Young Mr. Chester gazed at me wonderingly. For a second there was that in his face which suggested a certain pleasure, as well as surprise that I could feel so keen over his affairs. There rose before him a vista of joyful possibilities, wherein his youth and my twenty-two years in no way clashed, then he dismissed the thought as one unworthy of him—so soon—and answered me like a blunt school-boy.

"Know what I *do* want? No; do you?"

I had not expected this, and it served to lash me into further vehemence.

"Yes," I replied, hurling out my words defiantly, "there's just one thing I want, and nothing else in the world I want, and I want you and every one else to know it: I want to

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make a hit!—*I want to make a hit!*—I WANT TO MAKE A HIT!"

And with this I walked to the end of the boat, leaving Mr. Chester to reflect that, as yet, he did not entirely understand the genius woman.

V

ONCE I wrote a rhyme. It seemed very good then, and I called it a poem; but at the time I was on three weeks of one-night stands through Illinois and Iowa, and under these circumstances one should be forgiven much. It ran:

“Their lives are like their stretch of fields,
Each man pays toll;
For though the land rich produce yields,
He sows his soul.
Oh, may my life be of the hills!
Though hard and rough,
Monotony and all its ills
Is twice as tough.”

I had not intended it to end that way, but I could think of no other word to rhyme with rough except scruff, and it seemed no better. The company thought it ought to be dramatized, and they put it to a dirge, singing it to me whenever we had to get up at three in the

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morning to catch a train. So on the whole it didn't add to my reputation, and if the "first old woman" could have had her way it would have considerably damaged my standing.

She never cared a great deal for me, did Mrs. Defoe, but could find no reason for her intuitive dislike beyond my always asking her at supper how she had spent the day. Now, as every one knew, and as she was uneasily aware, she invariably crawled through the hours sitting in a rocking-chair in her hotel room, rocking, staring up unblinkingly at the sun, or reading the letter list in a dramatic paper. She quite rightly resented my endeavors to stir her into activity, became suspicious of my own alertness, and at last "found Scripture" for her antipathy in my written declaration for vicissitudes.

"I always knew," I heard her say on the night of the evolution of the rhyme—the dressing-room walls were, as usual, very thin—"I always knew there was something wrong about her by the way she flies around and sees remarkable things out of the car window. Objects to monotony, does she? All I have to say is—'watch!'"

I could hear the girls politely protesting as they endeavored to hide their amusement, but

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she swept their arguments away between flaps of powder on her face.

"Don't talk to me! When a girl tries to drag out an old woman to tear about the streets with her, she's trying to use her as a blind. Good exercise for me, humph! Very likely."

"Mrs. Defoe," I then called through the thin partition, "may I borrow back my soap if you are through with it?" And poor Mrs. Defoe subsided in helpless terror.

The Illinois circuit is a long way from London, yet all through those few days and nightmares before the opening of our play the silly words, set to the dirge of my friends, kept beating themselves into my brain. And that which I longed for was granted to me. There was very little monotony in our waking or sleeping moments save the entertainment of a constant fear—a fear growing hourly, which ever took new shapes and various guises, and became so huge a thing toward the end that I wondered if the quality were part of me or I of it. We all shared the sensation, although it is not a condition that actors talk about—this terror of the first night—excepting, of course, Frederica. Never having felt it, she was heard analyzing her quakings early in the game, even to the telling of her

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new relations when they met her at the boat train.

The relatives, who were English, did their best to calm her, principally that she might aid them in picking out her luggage. This she finally did, making an excellent first choice, and it was only by the greatest firmness that I induced her to give up my large trunk, which she had annexed because it looked familiar.

Mr. Benny didn't seem to get beyond staring at the cabs which were drawn up along the station platform. "I'd 'a' known it was London anywhere," he announced to me, delightedly; "hansoms all over the place. Imagine London being what I thought it was going to be!" And I knew the city had a strong convert from that time on.

The Farquhars and I were going to a hotel near the theatre, while the L. L. and Larry went to a fashionable hostelry that they might make a good beginning, though whom they were to impress I am not yet sure. They had started off with their luggage on one four-wheeler, and they themselves in a hansom; but Bella became imbued with the idea that this might not "look right"—presumably to the porters—and after much rearrangement of luggage

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they began all over again, each one in different cabs.

I leaned over the hansom doors as I followed the Farquhars, and peered through the soft twilight at the faces of those about me. I had seen them on my holiday trips before, but now they took on a new aspect. I was looking at our public. The cyclist, keen, alert, who slipped before, behind, and around the cab, would be of our gallery. The girl with a bag of books climbing to the top of a 'bus would patronize the pit; inside the 'bus were the dull-looking but respectable matrons and their husbands who would occupy the upper circle. The be-pompadoured patrons of the taximeter cabs flashing by my slower vehicle would fill the dress-circle; while the well-dressed women, their gleaming shoulders half concealed by gorgeous coats, who sat far back in their broughams, would be the sophisticated patrons of the stalls and boxes.

A little rivulet of fear crept down my spine. Would they be kind to us? When one sweeps the London streets with a glance, how little mirth is found among the passers-by. They are not a people who go about gladly, and yet at the next corner there may be a clash of wits

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between the drivers of a 'bus and cab that causes the American to "sit up," surprised at the quick retorts. England laughs when it is provoked to humor—could we provoke them with this play of ours?

Sometimes during those few days, when the sun came out from behind the clouds and the Thames looked almost blue, when the smell of the fresh earth of the Embankment gardens reached our nostrils and the flowers which both nations love touched our hearts—at those times we felt we could not go wrong. Then we would go up a narrow street to the cold, bare stage, and there shout lines into an empty amphitheatre that had a fearful echoing way of throwing back our inanities into our teeth, and as each act ended we would walk silently to the wings and ask ourselves: "Why, oh! why, had we not remained 'a acrobat'?"

When the gloomy conditions became overpowering, I would go out and gaze at the gleaming medals of the stage door-keeper. He had been a beautiful surprise on the day of our first rehearsal. Standing in his black, gold-braided uniform, with a patent-leather wallet slung over his shoulders and his chest displaying a row of honors on parti-colored ribbons, I had thought

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he was nothing less than an emissary of the King come to welcome us. More than that, he was smiling, which was almost unprecedented; but since he offered me my letters while firmly refusing to grasp my proffered hand, his position was forced upon me. Later I learned that these commissionnaires, as they are called, are made up of discharged soldiers who have fulfilled their time, but are still active old fellows and willing ones. So they serve as porters in most of the public buildings and theatres, and though frequently shy a finger or two, and sometimes a bit lame, I would prefer them to the horse-guards any day.

Inside the theatre there were no more medals, but the same amount of respect and much cap-lifting. I doubt if any stage-hand there felt himself superior to the actor. On the day of the first rehearsal I found Mr. Benny sitting uncomfortably on the edge of a chair and looking a little homesick.

"If one of those fellows 'd just come up and tell me I was blocking his way, and to get out, I think I'd feel more at home. I'm afraid to go to the dressing-room; there's a boy down there says he's goin' to dress me. I told him I didn't have but one change, and hardly cared to spend

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the money; but he's set as a rock, says he's goin' to do it anyway, that the management pays him. Of course, that's nice of the management; but I'm not like Farquhar and Chester and those English fellahs, who always have men around to tie their cravats. No one's ever dressed me since mother gave it up, and while I'm old, I ain't in my second childhood yet."

"It will be awfully nice for you, Mr. Benny," I consoled; "he will look after your clothes if you give him a half-crown tip weekly, and that will allow you more time to see the city."

"Look after my clothes!" cried Mr. Benny, more disturbed than ever. "Now, I suppose I'll have to buy a lot of suits so as to give that fellow somethin' to do. I was thinkin'," he added, in a lower voice, "of gettin' some of that colored underwear. I never cared much about my looks before, but I don't want him to think America's on the cheap."

"You must do exactly what you please, regardless of him," I urged; "he would despise you if you did anything else, and he will admire you most of all when you stay just yourself." I found it difficult to explain social conditions to as simple a soul as Mr. Benny.

"Well," he concluded, as though trying to

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extract some comfort from the situation, "I suppose he will be company for me during my long wait, and I'd like to buy the underwear, anyway, if you'll go out with me and see I don't get cheated. I can't tell the difference between their fifty-cent piece and their sixty-two-cent piece, and there's no use in my trying."

I went on to my room, which was next to Bella's and across from Bruce Farquhar's. They were only a few steps below the stage; the others dressed farther down yet; and as the stage itself was below the level of the street, after the manner of English theatres, the rest of the company led a most molelike existence.

Larry Chester was to have dressed with Bruce—at least, the English stage-manager had assigned the two to one room, as there was very little space; but Bruce wouldn't permit this. He wasn't at all undignified in his objection, and was most friendly to Larry, and I wondered why my blood ran cold when I heard his protest, which any actor would uphold.

"You'll have your day, too, old man," he said to young Mr. Chester, after his objections had been sustained, and Larry was preparing to continue his burrowing. "As leading man of this company, you know I really am entitled to

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a room alone. If I expect to command any respect at all, I must make a stand, you know; I really must."

I was deliberately listening to them through the partition, as Bella undoubtedly was through hers. Yet I was glad she was not with me, for I found my eyes wandering in a shamed way around the room; and even while I sternly reminded myself that Bruce's contention was right, according to all ethics of the stage, I kept thinking, for the first time, what a foolish way this was to command the esteem of his fellow-creatures while his wife dressed far down below with a lot of girls. And it occurred to me that Aaron—but this thought grew no larger, for I became very fiery with myself, and walked about the room sneering at my mean desertion, even in spirit, from the viewpoint of my comrades. And more than rebellious, I was frightened—frightened in the thought that I could find any flaw in the stage fabric that was so closely woven about me.

Bella came creeping to my room. "He's right," she whispered.

"I know he's right," I snapped, as though Bella had been disputing me. She looked alarmed. "Do you mean to tell me," I went

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on, "if a head clerk in an office was put at a bad desk that he wouldn't fight?"

"To be sure," assented Bella. "That's the only way a man could maintain his self-respect—to sit at the best desk."

Then I hated Bella for making it so plain that it was no way at all.

As for Larry, he said he didn't care a "whoop in Hades" where he dressed, only he was sorry that he would have to leave us girls—this last in a loud tone, because he knew that we were listening.

"Why, loaf here, of course," invited Bruce; "make it your headquarters."

"So long as the grease paint's on my face and not on the table, it's all right?" laughed the boy.

"Sure thing," corroborated our leading man; but I scored one for Larry.

When this incident was closed I turned idly to less real things, which were my letters. There was a fire in the open grate of my room, and a pleasant-faced young woman was tacking freshly washed hangings to the dressing-table. She paused as I turned to her, and removed the tacks from her mouth.

"This ain't my plyce, miss—to tack curtings, I mean to s'y; but the 'ousekeeper is that slow,

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and I wanted the room tidy. Ameliar is my nyme, miss; I'm the second dresser."

Now, Amelia did not say "plyce," nor yet "s'y," nor "nyme," but neither did she say place, say, or name; and the writer, capable of putting into words the dialect of a Londoner who is not a Cockney, but very near it, ought to be able to spell correctly the gurgles of a baby. As most of the women of the stage feel toward those who serve them, I found myself immediately becoming attached to Amelia. She had a masterful way with her—or is it a yielding way with us?—which suggested a proud responsibility and an eagerness to share my troubles if not my triumphs.

"Letters from 'ome, miss," she said, pushing a chair toward the fire. She would not have dared a question. This was a pleased assertion.

"Hardly, I think," I answered, running over the advertisements with the English stamp in the corner; and then, as my eye fell upon our dear Lincoln's homely blue face, "Why, yes there is, too."

"Two, miss?" repeated Amelia. "There's always *sure* to be one."

I didn't explain to Amelia, but ran my thumb

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hurriedly under the flap of the envelope and opened Aaron's letter. I was glad to get it, yet felt a little guilty, for, since reaching London, he had not been greatly in my mind—"crowded out for want of space," as the papers would say; and, strangely enough, Aaron knew that this would happen. He wrote:

"There will be times when London will engulf you, just as there are moments, hours, dear, when you are not on the exchange with me. There will be times when a laugh from that brute thing, your audience, will fill your heart; but it isn't there to stay any more than will the stock quotations which set mine beating serve to warm my being when the day is over and I am alone. Don't match me against the charm of that great gray town; don't you dare to contrast me with a mob of men and women grinning at your antics. Give them their place and give me mine. I'm not a vast population nor a tribute to your talent. I'm just a man who has pressed his lips against yours and felt yours pressing mine—yes, *pressing mine*. I didn't intend to write this, but it has been torn out with my sincerity. Great heavens, girl, can you give all you gave in that wonderful admission, and then go on with your 'pretends' and not feel the emptiness of them? Oh, if you were here now to look into my eyes, with your face between my hands, so that you could not dodge the question! You darling, slippery

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little eel, why did I let you go a-swimming off! I suppose you thought it was the end—that the broad Atlantic cut the cord. Why, I'm writing this three hours before your anchor is up, and I'm going to write others. Wouldn't you hate me if I didn't? Would it be fair to half wake you up and let you go back to your torpor? No, Rhoda, my love, I sought that kiss, I demanded it of you, perhaps, but in the end you gave it. That much of your gentle little self you gave to me; but I'm like the ogre, I want more, I want all of you. I want you behind my coffee-urn in the morning, and about my house during the day, and in the hollow of my arm all through the night.

"Have I said too much, dear? Forgive me. When I think that a word of mine could smash a business firm, and yet a whole volley of them leaves you undisturbed, I crave for violent expression. Child, child, wear your furs close about your white throat, and keep fires going all the time. An English spring is as delicate, yet as cruel, as—as my Rhoda.

"AARON."

I sat up in my arm-chair with the blood pouring over my face. I wanted to cry, I wanted to scream, I wanted to kick out with my feet as I'd seen children do. How dared he write that I had kissed him! What lack of fine feeling! How cowardly! Besides, I hadn't! And if I had, what then? It would only have been

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common politeness, common courtesy, like—well, like returning a call. It was a *pour prendre conge*, mere form, which one initials on the corner of one's visiting card.

Besides, I was over here now and it was finished, and we were all up to our ears in as wild a gamble as Aaron had ever known. Yes, and I was happy. Men on "change" are not the only ones who feel the stimulus of a big risk. At least they have nothing to lose but money. They do not have to stand for three hours before a body of men and women to be judged critically of their appearance, their manner of delivery, their personal appeal, and their ability to act—according to each auditor's standard—nor do they have to realize, as the actors do when they go through this ordeal, that their bread-and-butter depends upon the passing of these tests. And yet, like the financier who scents a contest, we derive a certain fearful joy in this strain that is put upon us. We do not know it at the time, and we never admit it unless a letter like Aaron's drags it out; but, as I believe I have said before, any kind of keen emotion, even a miserable one, is a pleasurable sensation to the actor.

So "I am perfectly happy," I announced

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once more, and it must have been aloud, for Amelia stopped her hammering and said that she was very glad, but that as I had been called twice she thought I ought to go "hup." After hesitating a moment whether or not to put my letter in the fire or in my shirt-waist, I decided on my shirt-waist and went "hup," but I kept my eyes averted from the others.

This was the last before the dress rehearsal. The scenes had been set up that we might accustom ourselves to the exits, and not, turning suddenly, find ourselves facing a blank wall, instead of the door we had intended to sweep haughtily through. The properties had been in use for some time, and a few of the men were wearing their gun belts and "chaps," and the women their large hats to see if they could manage them.

The stage-manager sat in the balcony, and talked easily to us through a megaphone when he wished to make a correction. On either side of him sat the English manager and Junius Cutting, and whenever an American expression was used that the Englishman could not catch, we were halted, and sometimes another phrase was substituted by appealing to the playwright. He was a nervous little fellow—Hallam—and

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he would get into a great stew if a line had to be changed.

"You know," he would call out, "I wrote this play for humanity at large, not for a small section of an insular public."

"That's all right, Mr. Hallam," Mr. Cutting's voice would come back from out the blackness, "but it's a small section you're playing to right now."

Then Hallam would think of another line, and he and the actor who would have to "mutilate his speech" would go off into a corner afterward and mourn for the lost "atmosphere." Everything is atmosphere on the stage that isn't temperament. He was a nice little playwright, Mr. Hallam, and, unlike most of them, regarded his stage-manager as his natural enemy, which was a bond of sympathy between us and him. He was too nervous to put on his own plays, but he was always present, and he had a way of saying as we would come off a scene, "Splendid, perfectly splendid, but—" And then he would go on to tear us politely to pieces.

He had the wisdom, however, of a man who had produced many times—and the tolerance. If he found an actor substituting one word for

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another, and that word was better than his, he made no comment, but would go quietly over to the assistant stage-manager, who held the script, and write in the change. Sometimes an aside, invented by the player, and half uttered to carry him off the stage, has been caught by the audience who have encouraged him with a chuckle, until the line became established and one of the laughs of the piece. On the other hand, if Mr. Hallam thought the word which the actor substituted not so good he would say, casually, "That's not quite the line, is it?" and the head stage-manager, walking up and down the aisle, would growl, "Watch your script," whereat the meek assistant would read out the right words, and the artist would know that he was vanquished.

These changes continued up to the night of the dress rehearsal, until Mr. Benny said he "didn't know whether he was an English dude or a member of a Bible class." His strong Western dialect, with the drawl of the Tennessee mountain man, had also to be modified for London ears, and this he submitted to; but when they came to divest him of his garments, declaring them to be unsuitable, Mr. Benny's little spine bristled in rebellion. "There's

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nothing left of this character now but the pants," I heard him expostulate, "and I'll be dog-goned if I give 'em up." And he didn't.

I was a half-breed squaw in the play—very modern as to dress, however—and the difficulty of getting my heavy gutturals over the foot-lights was taking the flesh off of me at a pound a day. Would they hear me, and, if they did so, would they understand? was my constant inward cry. At least I was absorbed in this dreadful occupation. I remember being vaguely conscious of the fact that I had thought of my part before I thought of Aaron Adams when I awoke the morning—the noon rather—of the dread day.

We are always glad to have a long dress rehearsal lasting into the morning, as they generally do, on the night before an opening. Then we can sleep late into the day and have but fewer hours to suffer before theatre time. Possibly, thinking of Aaron would have been pleasanter. I awoke conscious of a misery that at first I could not define. What was this weight upon me? Could it be the lobster of last night's supper? No, I was in London. In London? Then it was the play. *The play, of course!* This was the night, and yet, not yet

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the night, for hours were to be dragged through. I felt for my watch, hoping that I had slept late, but it was only twelve. How cruel this was, I railed, since I had not closed my eyes until six. I lay back and tried to compose myself for sleep, but found myself going over and over my part, marking where the laughs ought to be, and then shrieking at myself in derision that I should count on laughs, when I would do well to escape the hissing of the house.

The hissing! The word lifted me up with my hands to my temples. Well, why not? I had heard that in England what they did not comprehend, they resented. Why should they not hiss a half-breed in fantastic garments with an Indianized, Americanized, Anglicized dialect? Who could blame them? But oh, the cruelty of hissing a human being doing her best! In spite of the poor esteem in which our calling is held at home, we do not have this token of disfavor thrust upon us.

In an hour I had breakfasted and was dressed. I had tried to spend time on my nails, but the file grated on me. I had tried to while away some extra minutes in doing my hair elaborately, but the lifting of my hands above my head became intolerable. The breakfast was sent away with

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the egg-shells only crushed; at this stage I could not struggle with a small spoon and an English egg-cup. In the hotel corridor I met Bruce Farquhar's wife. There was no exchange of salutations.

"Bruce has gone out, too," she began. "I wanted to go with him, but he said he wanted to walk rapidly. Besides, I've just a line or two, so of course I don't feel quite so nervous."

I knew that she was doubly fearful, for her sweet self and him, and I asked her to come with me, but she said it would be better if I didn't talk in the raw air, so I went on. Larry Chester was not as thoughtful, however. He was sending up his card as I entered the office, and came toward me with some of his fine color a little faded.

"Hullo!" he ejaculated, elaborately airy. "Thought perhaps you might want to take a walk, do the British Museum, see the Zoo, or— or something."

"Larry," I interrupted, "are you scared?"

The boy looked at me doubtfully, with much of his bravado gone.

"I don't know," he said, simply. "I never felt like this before; I seem to be going down,

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forever going down in an elevator. And I keep yawning so."

I smiled at his description of the first symptoms of stage-fright.

"Say, Rhoda," he continued, in a lower tone, as though in fear of the truth getting abroad, "have you heard that they 'boo'?"

"They what?" I exclaimed, knowing well whom he meant by "they."

"Boo!" he repeated. "He of the medals told me. He says it doesn't happen often to the actors, but when the play is bad they call out the author, and then they all cry, 'Boo!'"

I leaned against the portals of the hotel door.

"But it does happen sometimes to actors!" I breathed.

He nodded his head. "So the doorman told me. Of course it won't happen to you. You're all right, but you know my luck can't last forever."

"Not happen to me!" I wailed. "That's just what will happen. Hisses and boos; oh, Heaven help me! Larry, let's walk."

And walk we did, even to the Zoo, where we stared with unseeing eyes at the monkeys until I found one that looked like me with my half-breed make-up on. That brought the whole

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miserable scene before me again, and I induced Larry to say "Boo!" to it, while I hissed, just to see what would happen. But nothing did; the creature looked at me mournfully, and went on devouring an apple. "And, after all," I said, "there's nothing more *can* happen. They will boo, and I will look at them and go on with my lines. It's something that must be endured, an experience I must go through with, my punishment, perhaps—"

My voice choked, and I pulled up the fur collar to keep out the chill air, and for just a second I saw myself before a wood fire in Aaron's house, warm and sheltered and fearless. Then I found Larry shaking me by the shoulders and laughing.

"Cheer up! Eleven o'clock has got to come; it's early dinner-time now. Say, don't you want a drink?"

"No," I answered; "nor must you take a drop until the play is over. Don't muddle up your brain and think you're finding courage. You're going to make a real success, and I shall be very proud of you."

"What a dear girl!" said Larry, slipping his arm through mine and steering me toward a hansom. "I hope we'll see a lot of each other,

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you give me such a mental boost. Now, that girl at home—”

I looked up at him curiously. How overpowering is this relation between man and woman—women, perhaps I should say, in Larry’s case! In the possibilities of a new conquest that lay before him, he had almost forgotten the few remaining hours of suffering.

I dined with the Farquhars silently; we all had soup, then looked at a steak and dismissed it. It was still broad day when we approached the theatre, but already there were two solid lines of men and women winding down the street forming the gallery and pit queues. They had begun to line up six hours before, Bruce told us; it had been drizzling all day, and yet they stood ungrudgingly—the British public exemplified in the patience of the London first-nighter. I gazed at them beseechingly from under my big hat. These were the hissers, the booers, looking just like men and women whose vocabulary did not include strange, terrifying noises.

“There goes the leading lady,” one girl whispered to another. And I wished for a moment that I could have been, for Bella’s beauty would be an effective plea for favor.

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I envied the street tumbler who was throwing himself about the pavement to amuse the waiting queue. They had no thought of booing him. He was one of them; at least, they understood his queer contortions. Some of them tossed him ha'pennies when he passed his hat; many did not even look up from the novels they were reading. Two messenger boys who were at the head of the line, paid by the hour to hold their places until the patrons came along, were in tremendous disfavor. They were freely commented upon, and it was evident from the wagging heads of the gray-bearded first-nighters that the old pit wasn't what it used to be.

An hour later I was made up and dressed. There were flowers in the room with little American flags pinned to them, an offering from the English side of the management—fancy Junius Cutting—what? There were telegrams and notes from chance friends in town, and there was a cable from the company I had left behind. The others had their share, too, and the old commissionnaire came and went with the messages, passing them in with cold hands to be received by the dressers' equally icy fingers, and in turn placed in our nervous, trembling

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grasp; for the fear of a "first night" was over all the theatre.

The dressing-rooms were very quiet, and there was a desperate calm in the air. Occasionally one of the company tapped at my door, and we exchanged a word or two; but there was no speculation as to the success or failure of the piece—we were past that. Frederica, as the head of the dance-hall girls, flew in with the information that she had been to two teas that afternoon, but was so nervous all the time that she couldn't talk—much. And Bella called me in to ask solemnly if I thought it too late for her to rise from the log for her good lines. Mindful of Bruce Farquhar's consternation at seeing her walking about in this new fashion, I told her that she would probably be booed if she moved an inch, and this threat seemed to be sufficient.

Made up, as we all were, much too soon, we found ourselves waiting on the stage before the call-boy had aired his healthy lungs. The playwright was there, going quietly from one to the other, and assuring us that our interpretations of the parts were all that could be wished. Each player's eye brightened with delight by this diplomatic stroke, and every

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performance was bettered by the kindly act. There was some feeble attempt at persiflage among ourselves, but no one listened to the other, and then—and then out of the silence there came a burst of chords that cut short words and breath, a roll of the drum, a clash of cymbals, and “Overture and beginners, please!” shrilled the English call-boy.

This is the most dreadful moment of a *première*. There is no going back when the orchestra crashes, and unprotesting we gripped hands with each other. “Good luck!—good luck!—good luck!” ran from mouth to mouth as we turned to our various entrances. The asbestos curtain was raised, and the hum of humanity penetrated to us from above the music. The sound heartened us. They were not beasts, they were beings like ourselves. The band broke into “Dixie,” and there was a clapping of hands. The color pumped up into our faces—friends were in front who knew our music and loved it, and perhaps would love us. Perhaps, after all—then the air died down, the lights were lowered, and as the curtain was slowly raised on a forest of red woods there was a murmur and a welling up of applause.

“Knew that scene ’d get a hand,” said our

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American stage-carpenter, deeply pleased with his handiwork.

In my ridiculous finery I leaned against the back of a set rock as I waited for my entrance, and breathed a silent prayer to whatever god adjusts these matters. "Just let me speak my lines; I don't ask for success, I don't need to make a hit. Just let me speak my lines, and, if it *can* be fixed, don't let them boo me."

A voice whispered at my elbow: "It's a cable, miss, if you have the time. Maybe it's luck."

Mechanically I tore it open, and read the contents by the amber-colored sunset:

"Whatever makes you happiest, that is my wish for you to-night. AARON."

I read it without emotion, then crumpled it up with a sudden indrawing of the breath and stiffening of the muscles, and threw it into a corner of the stage, a thing valueless to me, for, high up on the piccolo sounded the clear notes of burlesque Indian music.

There were no Aarons in the universe—that music was my cue.

VI

LARRY CHESTER said at supper when the night was over that the minute he heard my voice he knew I wasn't frightened, and that our scene would go all right—Larry was not relying entirely on his luck when the moment came—and Bruce Farquhar smiled at the boy's speech, for he knew that the first thing a player must learn is the control of the vocal chords. The heart may be in a tumult and the head in a whirl, but the throat must be a passive instrument as foreign to the being as is the cornet to the musician, which is a dead thing without the performer's inspiring breath.

The audience had been chuckling a little through the first lines of the play as the tenderfoot, Larry, endeavored to saw his stint of wood, but it quieted instantly as my song started off the stage. It was a backwoods gospel hymn, for I had been converted by the missionary and had been bedecked by her in various odd garments. At the last words I

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trailed into view, and stood at the back for an instant waiting for the laugh that the author counted on. It did not come. I started down stage, for I was not to speak until I had reached the boy. I was alarmed at losing the laugh, but at least no one had booed. Now, as I stepped into the radius of the footlights, there was a murmur in the stalls that was caught up by the pit, swelled to the balconies, increased in power as the whole house took it up, and continued until the laugh broke into hand-clapping. Even so had it been at my temperance revival, only they were twice as long discovering that they were amused as they would have been at home; but, on the other hand, the laugh continued twice as long—which I think is a fair exchange.

"We must give each other time for the thought to carry and the laugh to come," I warned in my mind, even as I was speaking lines. And Larry, who did not quite understand my stubborn insistence on playing slowly, nevertheless, with his easy adaptability, got into the tempo, and our dreaded first scene went off smoothly.

"One over," I said, as we made our exit. Each line I had been telling off as a shipwrecked sailor notches the days on a stick.

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Larry wiped the streaming perspiration from his face, although the stage was cold. "Not a hiss!" he ejaculated "And—listen—they're screaming at Benny!"

Delighted, we watched Mr. Benny's scene, yet always alert for our own cue. As the act went on we made our exits, exchanging little nods with each other—of congratulation or relief. The end of the act came, and there were two big calls for the players and another for the author, but the enthusiasm of the audience was quieted by lighting the house and turning down the footlights. The audience thought they had stopped of their own accord; as a matter of fact, the manager was reserving their enthusiasm for the end of the "Big Act." It is pleasant to play little tricks like this on a body of people who feel they have our fate in their hands

Amelia met me in the hall and began to divest me of my clothes before the door was shut, for it was a hard change

"Yer mykin' a 'it, miss," she whispered.

"Don't! don't!" I sternly forbade; "there are two more acts."

Silently she stripped me while I redid my hair. The playwright called through the doors:

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"All right, but slower, slower; let them get it," and the fireman swooped down upon him and told him he must not smoke. Up-stairs on the stage Junius Cutting worked with the crew to set the heavy scenery. It is doubtful if an English manager would do this thing; but nothing mattered in life just then to Junius except the setting of that stage in six minutes. At the end of the period Bella shrieked for more time. "My high boots won't go on!" she sent word by the call-boy.

"Then let 'er come without her boots!" answered Junius, savagely. And somehow or other she got them on—as one always does.

Not for one moment during those three hours did our strained nerves relax. Wonderful things happened, laughs came when no one expected them, and tears were shed over lines to which no one had given much value—except the author. Terrible things happened. Larry forgot a watch that was to tell the hour of a pistol-shot heard off the stage. Bruce Farquhar, seeing what the audience did not (the boy's look of terror as he felt in his empty pocket), immediately "faked" a watch in the hollow of his own hand, and from the experience of an old-stager spoke the tenderfoot's line. There

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was not an exchange of a glance between the two.

Later on one of the Englishmen and Bella got into a tangle with their lines on which largely hung the plot of the play. They did not hesitate, but went on speaking almost meaningless phrases. The audience leaned forward, thinking perhaps they did not catch the American parlance.

"Throw them the line, for God's sake!" implored the author to the prompter—the author himself had forgotten it.

"Not a word," hissed Cutting, "the audience 'll hear. Let 'em get back. They'll do it." And they did, going on with the scene smoothly; but those fearful seconds make wrinkles in a player's brow that never smooth out again.

The most awful lapse of the evening was mine—and Amelia's; and it came at one of the crucial moments of the Big Act, as the plot was reaching its climax. I had a quick change off the stage; that means no time to go to my room; so two folds of canvas were placed around the exit, and in such three-cornered seclusion I dressed. As I dashed from the stage I ripped off my waist, and, throwing it to the dresser, who was waiting, seized my other garment. But

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just as I was slipping into it I discovered the costume to be that of the last act. Amelia had become confused with my many rags, and had brought the wrong thing.

"I'll get it, miss," she whispered; then flew, before I could expostulate, with both my costumes in her arms. I listened to the lines on the stage, and, to my horror, found that the scene was playing much more quickly than it had rehearsed. This sometimes happens, and often the other way round. The half-breed, as emissary from her old tribe, must bring a message to the young hero, and there was the half-breed clad in an old skirt, with towels folded about her waist, to make her flat, as her only corsage. In desperation I fled from my little room to the more open space behind the scenes, and in the next instant an astonished stage-hand had been divested of his coat by a lady who needed it very much, and at the cue Bruce gave me I made my entrance with the missive in my hands.

There was a ripple of amusement through the audience; but the scene was serious, and they accepted the garment as one of the vagaries of a converted squaw. The actors, of course, were undisturbed. The action went on swiftly

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and more swiftly, the comic characters gave place to the serious members, and were wisely taken off the stage, and the climax was reached after the element of suspense was prolonged to the uttermost, but not the too uttermost.

This was the act when the lights in the house were not turned up as the end came, when the footlights remained bright, and the curtain was rung up and down with alarming rapidity, while Junius Cutting kept count that he might cable the number of calls to the New York papers. In tableaux and as a body of artists the company were recalled, then the principals came out individually, and as I stood, ugly and alone, in the centre of the stage listening to the British lion roaring encouragement, my last agonizing fear of booing rolled away.

The author was demanded, and for a moment wavered uncertainly between Cutting's advice to go on and the English manager's warning to "stop" where he was.

"They'll boo you!" cried the Englishman; "they do it now for larks."

"Let 'em," urged Cutting. "Take your call, Hallam."

And, truly enough, when Hallam stepped upon the stage, a prolonged boo was heard above the

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plaudits. This was immediately drowned in laughter, with renewed applause, and little Mr. Hallam made a merry little speech which he had evidently carefully rehearsed.

The company stood on tiptoes in the wings and listened smilingly, then trooped to the playwright after the curtain fell and shook hands with him—with almost any one. Indeed, FredERICA wrung JUNIUS CUTTING'S twice before discovering her dreadful error.

"Don't be too cocksure," grumbled Mr. CUTTING, and—

"Keep it up! keep it up!" exhorted Mr. Hallam; "the last act must not let down an inch." And thus admonished we fled to our rooms.

"Oh, you *are* mykin' a 'it, miss!" exclaimed the irrepressible Amelia, probably to divert my mind from the costume episode. And once more she said it, only the tense was in the past, when the last act was over.

I sat with my head on the dressing-room table, while the tears trickled down my cheeks and my body shook from exhaustion. The dresser, accustomed to these pranks, sent for some brandy, and the commissionnaire, with his medals newly polished, brought it to me.

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"I say, miss, you 'ave 'it 'em hard!" he commented. "All the pit was a-talkin' of you as they went out."

I lifted my homely, blotched face to the old dear. "Do you really think so?" I quavered to him.

"Wyte for the papers, miss, you'll see. I 'aven't been on this 'ere door ten years for nothin'. Hit's a go, miss, the 'ole piece, and all the lydies and gentlemen, but you especial, miss."

"Go away," I said. "I'll burst with pride." And, two shillings richer, the old man made his exit.

An hour later six of us sat about an improvised supper-table in the Farquhars' hotel room. The restaurants are sternly closed at half-past twelve in London, and it was nearly that when we had left the theatre, for there had been many delays, calls from friends, slight suggestions from the playwright—at such a time absurd—and, with it all, a certain pleasant heaviness of limb and torpidity of brain which made it impossible to move quickly.

Frederica, who was to spend the night with me, broke the slight silence as we pulled up our chairs.

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"To think I should have forgotten my hat in that dance-hall scene!" she said, with a forlorn laugh.

Now Frederica had made her entrance in the act with a crowd of women, danced with the cow-boys, and went off again with no word to speak beyond, "Come on, girls, he's going to treat," but we all saw in a moment that this was a serious matter to her, so were elaborately polite about it.

"I wouldn't worry," placated Larry Chester. "The audience probably thought it was shot off outside by one of the miners."

Frederica refused to be comforted.

"You danced splendidly," said kindly Bruce Farquhar's wife.

"Did I?" smiled Frederica, slightly touched. "Did you see any one watching me?"

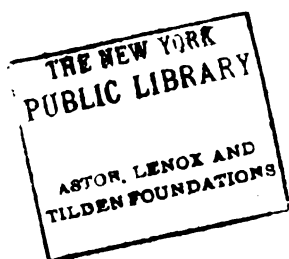
"Not the audience," confessed Mrs. Farquhar, "but I think I saw Cutting."

"Cutting watching me!" shrieked Frederica, "then I'll go back to-morrow. Of course he missed my hat!"

"Have you ever heard," said Farquhar, dryly, "apropos of nothing, of course, of the property man who, when it was discovered that a famous critic had run out from New York to see a



WE KEPT UP A STREAM OF CONVERSATION, AND ON ONE TOPIC ONLY—THE PLAY



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new play in a suburban town, wrung his hands and wept bitterly. 'A—— D—— in front,' he sobbed, 'and the cow not come!'

At this Frederica flew over to the story-teller, beating him fiercely upon the back, and order was not restored until the supper arrived.

We all found ourselves fearfully hungry, yet between the attacks upon cold meat, salad, and cheese kept up a stream of conversation, and on one topic only—the play. Once or twice we wandered from it; there was even an effort to discuss the best place to buy gloves, but this led up to Larry Chester's gauntlets being far too large; and Mr. Benny had no sooner wondered where he could get a "good coat, not too English," when the picture of me in the stage-hand's borrowed plumage came to them in a rush, and the occurrence which had been accepted at the time without a thought of laughter loomed up enormously funny in the retrospect.

"I never noticed it," said Bella. "I was trying to think how I could get up from that log without disturbing Mr. Farquhar."

Bruce smiled a little wearily.

"Did you get up?" I demanded.

"Well, I sat down again," justified Bella.

We all laughed again at this. It was so easy

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to be amused and to be kind to each other. If friction comes up at all during the run of the play, it is not present at the first night's performance. Sometimes we feel a little bitter when the papers are read next day and find one person, whom the genius actor does not value highly, reaping a harvest of good notices. Very often what is a good performance to a critic is not to a player. The actor knows by what tricks the man is winning applause, also knows whether or not the part is well placed in a piece, and if it is the author or the interpreter—the lines or the reading of them, that is the question—who deserves the credit. But the critic is rare who does not judge by what he sees and hears, and he is right from his viewpoint, for he is like the justice who decides a case according to the matter brought into the court-room, and not from what he believes lurks behind the evidence.

In our mellow mood we each took infinite trouble to tell the others how well they had succeeded, yet still we cried each to the other, "Wait." "I just don't think I can," said Frederica. "Imagine going to sleep with all those presses winking off their good or evil, for or against us!"

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I looked up from my last morsel of cheese. I had been so lazily content I had done very little but eat the food the devoted Larry ladled on to my plate, but I was not yet ready for bed. That would end this lovely time of kindness, of rapturous ease, of chaffing among my comrades, to lie between cold sheets and, with this new fear of the critics overcoming sleep, toss about until the roll of morning papers I had ordered the night before clumped at my door.

"Why go to bed?" I asked, examining my watch. "It's three o'clock; in an hour we can get the papers. Let us go out and walk or drive or run until they come."

"Now, that's a sport!" cried Larry Chester, rising and pulling back my chair to dump me gently out of it.

The wife of Bruce Farquhar looked eager, but demurred. "I think Bruce needs rest," she said.

Bruce Farquhar, six foot and broad-shouldered, picked up his little wife and tucked her under his arm. "Come on," he said, "I'll let her carry me when I'm too tired."

"There's a nice vegetable market somewhere near," said Mr. Benny. "Never saw such fine tomatoes in my life. We might go there."

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"Why, he means Covent Garden!" I exploded.

"Sure," said Larry; "and there's a fancy ball in the opera-house, the last one of the winter season. I came near going—if it hadn't been for you, Rhoda." This last in a loud stage whisper, which every one heard and much enjoyed. Bella feared it wasn't quite *au fait*, but was persuaded, and we walked out into the early dawn across the Strand up to the market-place.

There was a wonderful softness in the air that often leaves when broad day comes. The lights were still glimmering along the myriad rows of stalls, and the mist through which they shone was like the curtain of gauze in a Christmas pantomime. I say pantomime, for in and out among the chaos of great vans, tangled horses, shouting hucksters, and twinkling hansoms fantastic figures weaved their way. Some were in domino, some wore huge coats over fluffy short skirts. A harlequin and columbine had recklessly discarded their outer wraps and were riotously falling from one potato barrel to another. Finally a policeman gravely piloted them to a cab, and the hucksters laughed while they gathered up their scattered vegetables.

"Eh, ball night!" ejaculated one; "they's lucky ones who 'as the flowers to sell."

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This suggested a new thought, and we walked through the long, low market buildings to the flower-stalls. Here we paused, gaping, for the transformation scene had changed, and row upon row of spring flowers rose to greet us. A private carriage was waiting for one noisy party; the women still were masked, but they need not have been, for up to the tips of their elaborate head-dresses they were screened by armfuls of daffodils, flags, and green vines. The flower-women plied their escorts with importunities, quite conscious of their softened condition, and one fresh-cheeked girl winked at me slyly.

"Masks, miss," she said; "their guv'nors are sleepin' sound in their beds." Then mindful of her trade: "Carn't you 'ave a nosegay, miss?"

Eager to be in the running, young Mr. Chester wished to smother us all in flowers; Mr. Benny bought tomatoes; and Bruce Farquhar gravely presented his little wife with a large potted palm. In the midst of all this a man slouched by from out the fog, and then another and another, each with a colored poster pinned to his breast and a roll of papers under his arm. For a moment we held back, half afraid to buy.

"We are so happy," Bella whimpered; then

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Frederica valiantly set the example. When we had them all there was very little room for flowers, and no desire for anything in life beyond a place to read our fate and have it over with.

"The hotel is too far," gasped Mrs. Farquhar.

"But there are no restaurants open till six in this provincial town," her husband complained.

"Let's rent cabs and drive round slowly," suggested Larry.

"Cabs?" I repeated. "There's a cabman's shelter down the street. It's always open. We'll bribe them to let us in."

The procession of six wound their way down the hill to the little green-framed house where coffee and rolls are dispensed to the cabbies only. The man in charge declared that it wasn't done, but still we persuaded him—no matter how—and each with a different journal raced frantically through reams of crackling sheets.

Cries of "It isn't here! Oh yes, it is!" "Only a squib!" or "Full head-lines!" rent the air. Then for an instant there was silence while all eyes scanned hastily the criticisms of the play, and fell eagerly upon the actors' paragraph at the bottom, where, to specialize, each one searched madly for his name. Papers were exchanged with "Here, this is good for you,"

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or "Didn't I tell you the last act was best?" But there was little comment until we had galloped hastily through all of them. Frederica broke the ecstatic silence.

"And not one missed my hat," she said. Then we shrieked with the wild laughter of those whose last fear had disappeared, for among all that varying criticism each player found some kindly praise.

"As for you," said Farquhar, pinning an imaginary medal to my breast, "queen of the hits!"

My protests were drowned in a flood of assurances; even Bella asserted that I had made the greatest success of any in my line, and while I shared the line alone I squeezed our L. L. around the waist, for she had spoken from the depths of her stupid honesty.

"My dear people," I murmured to myself, as I turned once, twice, three times before I slept. "My dear work, with all its misery but all its joy. To think a man could ask a woman to give it up for him—for *him*! And to get what in exchange? A place behind his coffee-urn, a house to play in through the day, and through the night—"

Then I murmured nothing more, for sleep had come.

VII

IT was two weeks before the Farquhars and I changed our quarters for permanent abiding-places. That fortnight we had lived in so bewildering a whirl of bliss that it was hard to get down to the necessities of life beyond flying in and out of the morning tub and seeing that our boots were blacked. We had not been doing London. Oh no; with so much time ahead of us, we would never get around to that. But there were more rehearsals to cut down the play a bit, for the Briton must get out in time for his early supper; and there was talking through gramophones and posing for pictures, which often meant spending an entire day in the theatre with our war-paint on, and telling shoals of reporters how we loved England.

Then, too, there were old friends to be seen, and some acquaintances, who have a way of springing up out of the earth at the word success; and of writing to as many more and telling them politely that we couldn't quite place them

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—which goodness knows we couldn't, as we had probably never seen them; besides certain others—but these were not Americans—who wrote quite simply, without any pretence of knowing me, and invited me to tea and “bring the company.” It was interesting to learn by this that there are climbers even in solid England. There the resemblance ceases, however, for the last thing a climber would allow in her drawing-room at home would be an actor—at least, not if she expected to climb any higher. Over here while we would probably have come under the “freak class,” at least there seemed to be no uneasiness over our possibly annexing the family snuff-boxes. So I answered all my notes of this kind as courteously as I could, and pleaded rehearsals.

But by the end of a fortnight, when the long gallery and pit queue spoke a real success, and the libraries—the library institution is like our Tyson's—were buying up all the best seats for weeks ahead, we began to look about for homes. Poor strollers! It only takes a half a dozen photographs on the mantel-piece, a special one on the dresser, and the trunks unpacked to the bottom to be at home.

Bella stayed on in her hotel because she had

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five evening gowns and wanted to dress for dinner. Frederica was obliged to live on with her relatives, though she was not at all happy over this, and spent most of her days looking at expensive chambers, hoping to find a bargain for five shillings a week. No one knew where Mr. Benny lived. He would be seen occasionally emerging from a sort of well down by the Embankment, and I watched him anxiously to find if he looked under-nourished; but he never did, and came to my dressing-room nightly to tell me of the splendid restaurant dinner he had found for a shilling.

The Farquhars went to housekeeping. It seemed a very inexpensive proposition at first. Then they discovered that besides the rent for the flat and furniture they would have to pay a share of the rates—or taxes, we would say; also that the linen and plate were extra; also that the hall porter must receive a stated sum weekly; also that the maid must have extra money for beer; also that she must be insured, for if she fell down while in their service they would have to support her for life; and above all the alsos was the charge for and the menace of the inventory.

One would naturally think if the landlord

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wished to protect his property that he should pay for the cost of doing so—but not in merry England. The Farquhars paid a guinea for a long roll of manuscript telling them that there were eight breakfast-cups, one slightly cracked; that a small scratch would be found on the base-board two feet to the left of the dining-room door; that the spring of the spare bed squeaked slightly, and— But it went on for yards in this fashion, and the Farquhars had not been in a week before they found themselves daily circling the rooms on their hands and knees to find if there were any new defacements to be added to their list of expenses.

I had decided on lodgings, for I like living after the manner of the country I'm in, and Larry Chester thought he would go along, too. Now this would not do, one of the reasons being that I should be bored, and another that he would be. He had been clinging rather timorously to me ever since the Marconigram had been received, tearing out to have extremely good times at gay supper-parties, and tearing back to tell me about them. Larry was at the stage of adolescence when he feared by winking he might miss some one of the good things of life, or, to drop into the singular, some "good

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thing." He found me particularly satisfactory, for I was quite willing to see him when there was nothing else doing, and just as willing to let him go when there was. Now, the Marconigram girl would stop all that. "She demands so much," fretted Larry to me; "she's not a good fellow like you."

"Perhaps she cares for you," I suggested.

Larry eyed me suspiciously, his faith in himself almost shaken. "There are times," he would say, "when I feel that you don't."

Complacent as I was over Larry's attitude, I could understand for the first time how a wife who did not care madly for a recreant husband might make him considerably happier than one who did, and she herself remain as joyful as a negative person can be. And this set me to thinking about Aaron, for Larry was telling me whom he had met the night before, and I knew it would be a long story and give me plenty of time for my own reflections.

Aaron had not been entirely out of my mind during those two weeks. I had written him once and thanked him for his cable, and he, having seen our notices copied in the New York papers, had sent me a letter deploring the lack of acumen in the British public.

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"It's a strange thing," he wrote, "that it takes a broker and not a 'cricket' to know where you belong. I've always heard those critical chaps across the pond were sharks at getting at the truth, but I see they've only surface knowledge, after all. The *Times*, for instance, that stands for everything that's true and proper, why didn't their man cry out in their respectable columns: 'And as for you, Miss Rhoda Miller, take that putty off your nose, those plumpers out of your cheeks, scrub off that Indian red, tear off those wrappings which make your breast and waist and hips one hideous straight line. Throw back your shoulders, stop toeing in, go home, and once there hunt up your Aaron Adams, a most presentable young man who is yearning for you, and let him in turn hunt up a minister.' But did the critic say that? No. He said: 'Not in many years have I seen the individuality of an actress so thoroughly lost in the character she portrays.'"

Then Aaron went on to speak of other things, but not of the kiss, nor had I referred to it, or his mean cowardice, when I wrote to him. But it amused me to see that he had omitted from his quoting the last line of the critic: "It must be a joy to Miss Rhoda Miller to have so per-

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fectly found her niche." I looked at Larry smilingly from out my dreams, and he nodded his head in surprising affirmation. "It's a fact," he said, "the very first man she'd ever kissed." As this was a rude awakening from my reverie I must have expressed astonishment, which, as it happened, was the correct emotion, for he continued to nod happily. "She told me herself I was," he added, confidently.

Then I turned back to the embers of the hotel tea-room fire, and went on with my musing, for I realized that he was not as yet half through with his adventure. Of course, it was not difficult to put Aaron out of my thoughts when I wanted to; even our parting had grown a little dim in my mind, and for the next few minutes I chose and domiciled myself in an apartment all chintz-hung and Georgian-chaired. It was so easy to find such rooms before a glowing fire that by the time young Mr. Chester was saying, "Of course, it was all in confidence—anyway, I haven't mentioned names," I had decided to drive right out to the lodgings of my choice and pay a deposit on them.

Larry swung off to his club, and I took a cab by the hour, following the advice of a porter, although I didn't anticipate spending any time

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over the selection. I had decided to live uptown past Buckingham Palace, some because I liked the drive and some because I was entitled to a neighborhood, since this was my third visit. The first year an American stays in Bloomsbury, the second somewhere off the Strand, and the third she makes for a "good address," which means very little to her, but a great deal to her English friends.

Smartdom is most attractive at the beginning of the season. All the little houses are getting coats of fresh cream paint on their faces, the casements and doors are in bright green, and lovely boxes of pink geranium with white marguerites creep out from under every window-sill and swing daringly on the ledges. I began at the top of one of these small-housed streets and told the driver he could wait there, as I was just going in to get lodgings. He said he'd better follow me, as I then would not have so far to walk back. This was not encouraging; but I made my attack upon the first house having the little sign "Apartments" in the window, confident that neither the horse nor I would have much distance to cover.

The young persons who opened the first three doors at which I "knocked and rang" said there

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were no rooms unoccupied. "Then why," I asked of the last of the three, "don't you take your card in?"

The young person gazed at me. "Ow, we couldn't do that, could we, madam?"

"I don't know," I responded. "It doesn't require much muscle."

I never learned until after I had been several weeks in England that one is not supposed to answer this last inquiring phrase of all people who disagree with one, yet wish to be civil about it, or in rarer cases wish to be uncivil yet cover it up with a veneer of polite interrogation. It makes it practically impossible to grow angry with a shopkeeper, even though he might say: "And you do look a jay in that, don't you, madam?"

The young person at the third door passed over my flippancy regarding muscle, and went on serenely to explain: "If we would tyke it out, 'ow would they know there was apartments?"

"But there aren't!" I shrieked.

"Ho, yus, there are; there's apartments in the 'ouse, but they're let just now, aren't they, madam?"

Worsted, I went on down the street, and

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the cab trailed after me. At the next house I tried there was no card in the window, so I thought I might reasonably expect to secure accommodation, and as a result the door was firmly closed on me by an icy butler at the beginning of my request.

"Better stick to the signs, mum," advised the cabby, seeing my misadventure. With my usual low taste, the cabby and I became very good friends as the hour went on. He would drive down the street ahead of me while I was interviewing various landladies, and upon discovering a fresh-looking house with "lyce curtains" in the window would gallop his horse noisily back to announce his find. As it was a quiet street just off of Belgrave Square, our mode of procedure commanded a good deal of attention, and, through fear of having more doors closed upon me and all houses "full up," I sent him off to a public-house and bade him have a drink at my expense.

For two hours I searched and for two days afterward, and as I looked into the lodgings that are dubbed fashionable, all ready and pitifully furbished up for the opening of the season, I was in a state of continual amazement that women who must live in such uncomfortable surround-

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ings would make the smallest pretence of joining the fashionable spring throng.

The ground or dining-room floor consisted always of two square, dark rooms, generally not connected, so that to pass from one's bedroom into one's drawing-room one would have to make a toilet fit for meeting the other lodgers in the icy hallway. Those who were rich enough to engage the drawing-room, one flight up, would as a rule sleep on the floor above, and have to climb stairs whenever a handkerchief was required. The bath-rooms, if there were any, were always displayed with pride, and, while I have seen several porcelain ones in Bloomsbury, I did not find an inviting tub in all my wanderings through Belgravia or Mayfair.

I had long ago given up chintz and old mahogany furniture, when I found a drawing and bedroom with connecting doors. An early Victorian atmosphere hung over the house, yet, while there was no bath-room, there was a large wardrobe, which was more than I had seen elsewhere. Closets, of course, are not known in old England, and what the ladies who come up to town for the season do with their clothes is something I have not yet solved. Frederica, who had been around some, said that they wore

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them; but whether it is absence of pegs which limits their wardrobe, or absence of wardrobe which limits the pegs, she was unable to tell.

So I settled down in my lodgings, unpacked my photographs, rearranged the furniture, and piece by piece garnered and handed over to the house-maid, Cissy, the innumerable small bits of bric-à-brac which have a way of infesting English drawing-rooms. I gave as an excuse for this harvesting the fear that I might break them; and there was more truth in this statement than she knew, for a perturbed spirit and the ferrule of an umbrella could wreck the establishment in five minutes, and I could imagine the temptation on a stormy day. It was really very comfortable with an open fire going, and as soon as Cissy understood my remarkable ways, or, rather, as soon as she ceased to attempt to understand them, we got on very well.

There is nothing disobliging about a Briton, as we irritable visitors are apt to think; it is simply that he cannot accommodate himself to a way of doing things different from his nine-century-old fashion. When I told Cissy that my tin tub could be prepared before the fire in the drawing-room she wavered in and out uncertainly for half an hour, evidently with mes-

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sages from the landlady, but in deadly terror of delivering them. I went on with my coffee and toast, which was served at my bedside, watching developments. The burst came at last. But it was a very weak argument for an American.

"It ayn't done, mum," said the cowering Cissy.

"What isn't done, Cissy?" I inquired.

"The barth, in the droring-room; they has 'em by their beds, mum. You might splash the carpet, mightn't you, mum?"

"Yes," I replied, "and I probably will; but it might be an improvement. Think how pleasant to see your carpet clean and bright once more!"

This mode of talk was a mistake, and I knew it, but I had to have my little fling before I forced myself to the necessary disagreeable tone. "You tell Mrs. Buckle," I continued, hardening visibly, "that Americans all bathe before the drawing-room fire, but, as a concession to her, I will be careful not to splash."

Then the tub came up. It was a round one, something like the saucepan we have our eggs shirred in, but a little larger. I had been given my choice between this style and a chair-effect, and I took this because there did not seem so

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many different ways of bathing in it. Deciding is a painful operation for me at any time, and while I would be trying to do so the water would grow cold. Now, in the saucepan you simply get in and curl up like a snail, and there you are; but with the chair-effect one can sit on the ledge, feet inside, or one can sit inside, feet outside, or one can stand up even, if one is very careful not to splash, and mirthfully squeeze water from a sponge held over the head.

Perhaps, after all, I'm entirely wrong about the method. Even with my attachment for Cissy growing steadily, I realized that I should never know her well enough to ask her about it—or any subject of the King, for that matter. I went out to take tea with Frederica's people on the day I was to decide about the bath-tub, and there I met an agreeable young composer who, being of my class, so to speak—anyway, having quantities of temperament all over him—I found rather *simpatico*.

It occurred to me, since we found our souls "speaking to each other from out the darkness"—his expression, not mine—that I could ask him if he sat on the ledge or let his feet stick out; but just as I was leaning forward confidentially he leaned forward confidentially, too,

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and said that he didn't find me at all American, as I hadn't asked a single question.

When an Englishman tells you you are not like an American, you are expected to scream with joy. It is really the best he can offer you, and I suppose we should all behave better over it than we do. But I was just preparing to get back at him—my expression, not his—with a suitable reply when he, continuing his gaze, further said: "You are like a gentle aspen leaf blown by every wind." Then he flew to the piano in a rear room with no more warning, and began picking out a theme which was very twittery and did sound a little like a leaf.

I went on eating my plum-cake, however, which was delicious, and presently his aunt came bustling in to tell me I had given him an inspiration, and would I not come into the music-room so as to keep within his vision. I replied that I was awfully pleased to be an inspiration, but I had to go home to put coal on my fire. And, although there was still some plum-cake left, I really did go. Frederica was quite cross with me the next evening at the theatre. She said if I inspired the man I should see it to a finish, and not desert him to flounder around all night hunting up stray leaves; that

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he had been at it until four in the morning, all on the loud pedal, too, and, while his aunt loved the noise, their nice cook who made the plum-cake had given notice.

I was very sorry about the cook, and yet found it rather pleasant to be a leaf. To tell the truth, I was growing lonesome. Living so far up-town, I saw little of the company except at the theatre, and I ate my meals in solitude on the Early Victorian table, with my feet up on the carved legs—except when the landlady came in. Of course, I was perfectly happy in the theatre, and I was pretty happy as I drove home that night.

First would come sedate Pall Mall, or, rather, one would come to it. I don't suppose Pall Mall ever came to any one, not even to the First Gentleman of Europe. Then we made the sharp turn past St. James's Palace, with the sentries of that and Marlborough House on either side standing foolishly through the night, and after that swept out into the wide roadway up to Buckingham Palace, with the air cool from the park against my face. More sentries at the King's house, and sometimes lines and lines of waiting vehicles if there was a court. But we would pass through them easily, twist half-way

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round the palace grounds, and turn up to mine own street.

At times the moon shone softly, at times the rain beat upon me, but it was all delicious—except that I was quite alone. There is something selfish about being comfortable and quite alone. I felt that I should not be, or, at least, that I should unselfishly share it; besides, this was the time I liked to talk. This was the Aaron hour, when I used to find him waiting at the stage door, always a little red-faced and embarrassed over being a “Johnny,” and we would go out for our supper and our easy, idle fun.

Now, when I reached my lodgings I would fall up the dark stairs, feel my way to my door, and sit down in lonely state to what was left of the joint and a dignified bottle of stout. There were two large chairs in the room, one on either side the fire, and after supper, while I warmed my toes, I would stare reflectively at that other chair, wonder who would look best in it, and think how mean I was to have two chairs and use only one of them. Then the coals would drop one by one noisily into the ash-pan, and the clock on the mantel would click out each tick in a jerky way that was far from restful.

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I never saw a timepiece make so little effort to be companionable; it was just a machine, bidding me go to bed whether I was sleepy or not. The Parliament clock was scarcely more soothing, and sometimes, if the air was clear, the chimes of Big Ben would come filtering through the window when I did try to sleep, and I would toss about and tell myself what a really small person I was, after all, for two large rooms and a wardrobe.

"Tum tum, ta da!" went the first quarter of Big Ben one very particular night. "There, it's a quarter-past two," I said to myself, in my cavernous bed, trying not to get excited over it. "I wonder if it's my conscience? I wonder if I wouldn't be happier making some one else happy than to be happy just by myself? That day before the hotel fire, for instance, I saw so clearly how well one could get on with a nice, broad-shouldered husband who loved her, even though she didn't love him. Why, before the fire it was just as though I had tried it myself. At least, in such a case she wouldn't be fretting about him every minute he was out of her sight, and it would be very nice, indeed, to have him fret about her. Well, I'll think it over in the morning, and perhaps I'll ask Bruce

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Farquhar's wife, although she's rather old-fashioned. I really must get to sleep now. One little sheep jumped over a fence—two little sheep jumped over a fence—three little—”

“Tum tum, ta da! ta, da, tum tum!” chimed Big Ben, remorselessly. I wriggled.

“Half-past two! It *is* my conscience. And I ought to decide this right now and get it over with, even if I make a sacrifice. It would be better—best, in fact. Sacrifices are splendid things for people, and if I make one for anybody it ought to be for Aaron, as he cares most for me. Aaron is a good man, and I hear he is rich; but that doesn't matter. But why is he so stubborn? Well, I suppose he might say I am, too; even nations have that weakness. But what do two nations do when they are both stubborn—they compromise, don't they? Now, how could I compromise with Aaron—do the right thing, I mean, and still get what I want? The right thing, according to Aaron, I suppose, would be to marry him, and what I want is to keep on playing and—why, *there's* the compromise!—and yet hardly that, for while I would get only one thing more than I have ever had before, which is Aaron, Aaron will get two—

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me and the stage. It's really a sacrifice, after all—and what I want besides.”

“Tum tum, ta da! ta da, tum tum! tum tum, ta da!”

I swung out of bed, and groped for the gas. I was half laughing, which one seldom does alone. “You can go on, Big Ben,” I apostrophized; “before three o'clock I shall be the same as married.”

At the bottom of my red portfolio in a sealed envelope, labelled, “To be destroyed in the event of my death,” was Aaron's letter about the kiss. Up to that time I never could analyze the feelings that had made me keep it, but I could understand by my doing so how lots of people retain letters that sound foolish in a court-room. Anyhow, I certainly didn't want even Frederica to know, in case I was run over by a motor 'bus, that I had kissed Aaron as he said I had, so I had sealed it up in this fashion.

Now I realized, as I tore it open, that I had been moved to keep it as the written justification for the proposition I was about to make. Yes, there were the words: “Don't match me against the charm of that great gray town; don't you dare to contrast me with a mob of men and women grinning at your antics. Give

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them their place and give me mine." That was it, that last sentence, the crux of the whole situation: "Give them their place and give me mine." Crouched down by the dying embers for warmth, the red portfolio in my lap and the ink-well on the floor, I wrote to Aaron:

"It is all so plain to me to-night," I wrote, "our real need of each other, and how it has nothing whatever to do with outside matters, such as brokerage or acting. I wonder I have not seen it before, and I confess that I was wrong. I think, too, that we can be very happy, you doing the work you most care for through the day, and I doing my work, which is always play, at night. Then there will be the little supper for us two at midnight, for I shall not often have to play out of New York, you see; and even if I do I will know that you are where you are, and you will know that I am where I am. Not many married couples have such perfect understanding. And I promise you now, Aaron, that I should never leave you to go so far away again—certainly not over here to London, where I find myself so lonely. That will be my sacrifice for you. But now that I am here, dear, do steal a little time from that old brokering and come over for a rest.

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You need it, you owe it to yourself, and we will talk together of *the* day and whether or not Frederica shall be maid of honor. Don't cable me; you can't say things in a cable that I am rather sick to see all written out. But do write quickly—quickly to your Rhoda, who is willing to 'grant to them their place and give you yours.'" I thought that quotation from his letter as a clincher was rather clever.

"Tum tum, ta da! ta da, tum tum! tum tum, ta da! ta da, tum tum! Boom!—boom!—boom!"

"Big Ben," I said, smiling through something like tears as I snuggled down in the covers, "you can do your worst; my conscience is clear at last."

From that day I took in a shipping paper, and figured if my letter caught the French boat how soon the English steamer would bring an answer. I couldn't reasonably expect one under thirteen days; and as that was an unlucky number, I agonized between a willingness to take that chance or hoping it would be fourteen. Of course, I wasn't concerned about the substance of the reply; but I naturally was curious to learn just how Aaron would take the surprise. Then, too, I feared he might rush over and want

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to marry me straight off, and once I almost cabled him to return the letter unopened.

I went out shopping with Frederica instead, and while we bought very little we laughed a great deal. It was so easy to laugh, for that was the seventh day and I knew my letter had reached home. Home? Anyway, that high office far down-town, where the ticker goes on forever, like the brook and my clock, and one can watch the ships sail down the harbor on their way to England. Frederica said if I didn't stop staring at the lingerie in the windows I would attract a crowd. She said I was shameless, and this frightened me into thinking she suspected something, although she had never been known to do such a thing before. So I looked at mackintoshes for the rest of the afternoon. I really bought one and wore it out to the dressmaker's, for of course it was raining, and there in the exuberance of my spirits I told her a joke which I had no right to do.

In America, if one is sufficiently unbending, one can tell jokes to all classes and run a fair chance of being understood. Over here, if we only exercise a little discrimination with our anecdotes, we shall probably have our story capped by a better one, but slopping over in our

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humor, as we always are, we tell our tales at random—and get what we deserve. The dress-maker remarked that it was a pleasant day, wasn't it, modom? (All salesladies say "modom," just as ours say "cawsh!") I shook the rain from off my new rain-coat and asked if she had ever heard of the Englishman who, after three months of sunny weather in the States, finally reached his native heath in a cold, windy, miserable drizzle. "Ah," said the Briton, happily, gazing up at the dreary heavens, "none of your damned blue sky!" It was an old story, and I did not expect much response. Frederica obligingly showed that I had arrived at the end by a little giggle, and the modiste drew in her breath with a gasp of horror. "Aoh," she commented, "he shouldn't have used that bad word, should he, modom?" And that taught me a lesson, for cursing is not done in England.

It did Frederica and me a great deal of good, and carried us joyously down to the theatre, for she had dined with me. I was very glad to reach my workshop those days, strangely enough, not from my love of it, but for the time it killed. "Six days more, anyway," I sighed, as I entered my chintz-hung dressing-room.

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Amelia had evidently stepped out, for the room was empty; but there, ostentatiously propped against the pin-cushion, was a white envelope, blue-lettered, and addressed to me. With a great throb of pleasure I seized the cablegram and tore it open. "He couldn't wait, he couldn't wait," I whispered, and then—

"Cable quite sufficient. Will support my wife without assistance, thank you. From present situation, realize my condition not as bad as might be.

"ADAMS."

That was all. I read it twice, and then counted the words—there were twenty-eight including the address; after that I thrust the hateful thing into the fire and turned to my make-up. Frederica said when the curtain had fallen that I had given quite my best performance yet, and she thought my outing did me good.

Then I drove "home," up Pall Mall, past St. James's, around the King's house to my flickering coal fire, with the remnants of a joint for supper and two big chairs to sit in for the rest of my life.

VIII

I WROTE Aaron Adams eight letters, but I sent only one of them; perhaps it was not the best one, but I had torn up the others. This was it:

“Your cable was received, and I was glad to note that you are accepting your ‘present situation’ with philosophy. I hope you will feel that way always, especially when you come home tired from your office, enter your empty apartments, and sit down to a solitary dinner. And I sincerely trust that you will not miss me when the stroke of eleven arouses you from your evening’s reverie, and you realize that I am taking off my grease-paint with cold-cream and preparing to go out to supper. I do not wish to be hard; but since it has seemed best to sever the cord that has bound us so closely together, I must insist that you make no attempt to write me, for as sure as I see your square hand-writing I shall send the letter back to you unopened. I do not dare you to do this, knowing that you never take a dare, and I solemnly tell you in advance that all efforts to apologize will be futile. It is needless to say that our paths diverge

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from the reception of the cable rather than from your receiving of my letter. Mine, alas (the path), shall be trod alone—all alone.

“Very respectfully,

“R. MILLER.”

It wasn't a very Machiavellian letter—I never shone in rhetoric at high-school or in dissimulation anywhere; but I think I can flatter myself that it hid the blow he had dealt me, and I was glad afterward that I didn't let it go with the postscript, which was: “Oh, Aaron, how could you!”

I wept buckets of tears the first week, not over Aaron's refusal, but because it was very sad to have one's unselfishness so misinterpreted. Yet all the time I kept telling myself how thankful I ought to be that I was not in love with him, when it would have been real anguish, and not hurt pride, that was troubling me. I was glad, too, that I had burned the cable, and I often wished I could burn the words out of my mind also; but there they stuck, cultivating a habit of rising up to confront me at the most absurd moments.

That last sentence, in which, not content to humiliate me, he went on to insult me, always chose the second act to make itself prominent.

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There I was in the dance-hall, singing hymns and sipping fire-water—doing enough, any one would think, to keep my mind occupied, yet all the time between my droning and sips those hateful words beat themselves out:

“Oh, Beulah land
(From present situation),
Sweet Beulah land
(Realize my condition),
As on the highest
(Not so bad)
Mount I stand
(As might be),
And view the shining
(The wicked dog),
Glorious shore
(Means he’s well out of it),
My heaven, my home
(Well, so am I)
For evermore
(Gracious, I wonder if I’ve been singing!).”

“Bella”—in a whisper to the leading lady, who had converted me — “have I sung that song?”

Bella, also in a whisper, while gazing at her convert sorrowfully: “Of course; don’t you hear

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them laughing. You aren't getting mechanical already, are you?"

That "getting mechanical" was a sort of a slap, or intended as such; but to become so is nothing more awful than the result of a long run, when we have all grown so accustomed to our lines that if we really stopped and thought what we were saying we would probably cease to say it. The inflections remain the same in the voice, we throw the same amount of vigor into our work, faithfully follow the same business, but our sub-consciousness is on a trail of thought all its own.

Sometimes our inner thoughts are so strong that they struggle to the surface and express themselves in words, and that is all wrong—they must stay in their cellars. I remember, a few years ago, a buxom-looking actress, who was playing a termagant, exclaiming, in the midst of her vituperation: "I don't care, I love him." We all thought it a tremendous joke, for she was of the strong, common-sense kind, and we were amazed when she burst into tears upon our joyously telling her of the interpolation. So, of course, we all "pretended" immediately that we had made it up just to tease her. But in the course of the summer that woman married a

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criminal, a frightful character, and after that we always referred to her as "Poor, dear Sadie!"

I thought of her the night I spoke to Bella more understandingly than I ever had before, and somehow I found the tears coming into my eyes. They must have been much in evidence, for although my comedy scene went as well as ever, I heard a woman who sat in one of the boxes say: "What a pity she's so ugly, she has such swimming eyes!"

Oh, those proscenium boxes of the old-fashioned theatres! Each scooping out a quarter circle of either side of the stage, so that the occupants are practically of us, save that their manners are not so good, for, while we only whisper about them, they express themselves with brutal frankness about us, and in a speaking voice. Being built at this angle, the back of the box is almost against the audience, so that foolish bridal couples would greedily take a box to themselves occasionally and sit at the back, he with his arm close around her, and she snuggling up to him through all the pathetic parts, or looking up into his eyes and squeezing his hand. Of course they had no idea that the actors and actresses could see them, since the audience couldn't; but it filled me with a most awful rage

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in those days. I suppose they thought nobody ever loved anybody before—least of all, not an ugly half-breed.

Then after that I would go limp—of course this was all inside of me; that stupid audience never knew, not even a critic would know—for who, please tell me, *did* love me? Did Larry Chester? I felt when he was around that if I pushed him my hand would go right through his body, as though he were something very nice, but frothy, like whipped cream or soda-water.

Larry was a joy for three hours, and, though he didn't know the etiquette of the stage, would move during some one's important line, jump in on a laugh, or else wait so long for it that one felt a fool, still he was pleasant to play with. To one line of the author's he spoke two under his breath, not because he had anything in particular to say, but because he wished to show how easy it was for him to act. Now, any player can do this as much as he likes—until the stage-manager discovers him—so long as he is whispering through the action of the play and not the lines. There Larry, being a novice, did not discriminate, and while no game actor would complain to the stage-manager, there were many

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wordy wars with the young gentleman in the privacy of our dressing-rooms.

He was always base enough to apologize immediately, so that it was impossible to quarrel with him, and he followed up his apology with tons of flowers. Yet with all his inexperience he was so instinctively an actor that he was not in the smallest degree discouraged by my nightly hideous appearance. "I cannot like Bella, I cannot," he confided to me one matinée, as we were both industriously tending bar in the play; "she cannot act."

For a moment I looked fondly at him. Here was a boy—fluff, perhaps—who was so much bigger in his views than Aaron that he could forget my ridiculous rôle for the reason that I played it fairly well. Young Mr. Chester, seeing my melting eyes, squeezed my stained hand under the shelter of the high bar. "Little thing," he murmured.

At this, quite to Larry's surprise and mine, a wave of resentment swept over me, and I snatched my hand away as though he were poaching on preserves that were not his. And yet if not his, whose?—besides mine, of course—and what did I care if my finger-tips were or were not clasped by a silly boy? "Protecting my-

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self for whom?" I bitterly interrogated, as I poured out Long Bill's whiskey—and I gave him an unusually large drink, which caused him to protest under his breath, for they all hate the brown sugar and water, which they must down with a merry "Here's how!"

Larry, as usual, took his unique methods of revenge. "You ought to be ashamed to treat a little boy like that," he whispered, as we were preparing Bruce Farquhar's treat for the crowd and gathering in the tin money. "If you don't apologize by the time I reach that dowager with her tea-tray on the box-rail, I'm going to upset it as I pass."

The dowager occupied one of the stage boxes, and so enjoyed her tea, which had been served between the acts, that she had gone on pouring and stirring and clattering the china after the curtain was up. This was rude of the dowager, and Larry intended to administer justice by a slight side-step as he swung round with the glasses, and in this way pay me back, for I loved model deportment on the stage, and he knew it.

Sure that he would make good his threat, I sued for peace, but while there was much satisfaction in Larry's breast there was none in mine. I was feeling in those days like a loosely

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jointed doll who sits down suddenly and flops about, only the dismemberment was not in my body but my mind. Above all, I resented this invasion into the theatre of my outside griefs. Griefs? Well, let it go at that. I tried to believe that annoyances more fitly described the condition.

Heretofore, when I swung open the old stage door, the rush of stale, moist air that greeted me would sweep back the little troubles that are of real life, and for the few hours while I went through my pretend they would leave me. They might loiter about, perhaps, in the narrow court until I came out, but then they found me refreshed and ready to grapple with them after my playtime. Now they were with me constantly, and, what was most curious of all, I wanted them with me; even while I railed against them, I hugged them close.

Frederica came into my dressing-room as I was blowing my nose very hard one night—I had a cold—and said I ought to go out into society; that was the only real way in life to forget one's difficulties. Once when Frederica was car-sick I had offered her a soda mint, and she had replied that she didn't think she was well enough to take it. I reminded her of this,

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and asked if the remedy would not be worse than the illness; but she said it stood to reason it was a good thing, for hundreds of people were at it all the time, and they must be seeking distraction from greater troubles or they wouldn't be there—"it" and "there" vaguely meaning society.

Frederica admitted that she herself had no troubles, and was going about seeking materials for a book. That book had been her excuse for doing anything she wanted ever since I knew her; but I didn't care to touch on this, for she had been splendid after the arrival of Aaron's cable, never asking me the contents or why I had such a cold, but just giving me little hugs now and then, and not pleading for my confidence beyond saying five or six times a week: "If you have anything to tell me, Rhoda, don't hesitate."

She went on to assert that so far as sorrows were concerned, hers only began when she got into a tea-room and was supposed to hold a plate of cakes, cup and saucer, and an animated conversation all at the same time. So we resolutely decided that if we did go about together we would each secure a corner of the drawing-room table and have our meal comfortably.

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That sounded like a speculation to me, and speculation reminded me of Aaron, though a corner in tables was hardly what he would go in for. But for the moment the thought made my cold worse. Frederica noticed it, but said nothing beyond completing arrangements to take me to a large reception the following afternoon. "Just let go," she concluded—"just let go and enjoy yourself."

Since she was so sincere about it, I tried to be also; although, to my imagining, the last place in which to let go would be a London drawing-room. I found, the next afternoon, however, that, so far as muscle-relaxing was concerned, I could have let go easily, and I am quite sure that one or two fat old ladies did lie back and rest upon the crowd, which, being very dense, still kept them in a horizontal position.

Our names were called out at the door—at least, mine was; but Frederica's, being complex, was politely mumbled. Frederica said any one with a name like Miller was cut out by divine intention for London drawing-rooms, and that I really ought to be known as the "footman's joy." We were no sooner beyond the doors than we were caught up in a great crush of humanity all edging in the same direction. "Are

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we going toward the hostesses?" I asked, for this was a club function.

"Gracious! no," replied Frederica; "to the tea-rooms. It's after five o'clock, and these people are almost frantic."

This was not the whirl of gayety I had looked forward to being swept into. It savored more of the treadmill, except that with a treadmill there is only the mill to step on. I found myself wondering at the remarkable way an Englishman has of accomplishing his purpose and yet being polite about it. Seven times one large, lank creature stepped on my foot. Seven times he said "Sorry," yet he never gave place to me, but with his eyes concentrated upon the buffet-table in the far room minutely yet steadily advanced.

When we finally reached the tea-room we could get nothing until we were discovered by two men whom Frederica had met at a relative's, and after a series of "Sorrys" and "My faults," they managed to wrest tea-cups and cake from other groping hands and fed us bountifully.

By the elaborate rolling of Frederica's eyes I could see which of the young men she had picked out for me, and by the manner in which she hung upon his words I realized anew her

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sweet generosity in giving me the one she herself preferred. That alone would have put me out of the running; besides, he was not of the startling type of Englishman that we seldom see but read of in our funny papers. I admit, having accepted the Earl of Pawtucket as our standard, we Americans are hard to please, but this man of Frederica's had spent his boyhood in Australia, with kangaroos frisking around his front yard, and he did not mistake my frivolity when I asked him if he wouldn't leap about a little just to show us how they went.

The other man, however, emitted an expostulatory "I say," and this prejudiced him greatly in my favor. His name was St. John Melford, and when I asked him if they called him "Saint" or "John," he said they called him "Bunny." I liked that, too, for all of Ouida's big men were called by foolish names. He was good-looking, though I can't tell why, for his face seemed to have so many more valleys than ridges that I wondered how it could remain a face at all. Only his nose saved him; it was like our own dear Highbridge over the Harlem. As for the well-tubbed appearance you hear so much about, I know he employed not only the chair-effect but

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the saucepan as well. And his neck had the raw appearance of those who use soft-soap.

He managed his tea and cake beautifully, roaring at the same time. He roared at everything I said, not after I said it nor during the saying of it, but before I had made any sort of a start. If I had not been looking for just his sort, and realizing it was like the hunt for the needle in the haystack as a rule, I should have been annoyed. I suppose, poor dear, he thought his loud bursts of laughter were what we Americans craved. I managed to get through one anecdote, however, before he knew it was going to be a joke, and indeed it was not intended to be more than an idle pleasantry until he neatly capped it.

We had been talking of Indians, and of their frequent appearance on the stage of to-day. "Of course, I'm only a half-breed in our play," I explained; "but you may remember what the young tenderfoot says of my father, 'Her papa was a full-blooded Indian squaw.'" I smiled a little feebly, and Mr. St. John Melford looked interested.

"Yes," he said; "and *was* he?"

After that we went home, for nothing better could happen. Frederica and I had intended

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to walk, and we rather thought the Britons might come along, too; but Mr. Melford so insisted that we take a cab, running to get one himself, that we did not urge the matter.

"It isn't correct to walk on the street with young women," whispered Frederica.

"For whom—the young women?" I whispered back.

"I don't know. Get in."

I got in, and extended invitations to tea. "The landlady can chaperone us," I supplemented, as Mr. Melford looked uncertain. Then we drove on.

"Frederica," I said to her, "that Bunny man insisted upon getting this cab. Do you suppose he paid for it? I shall certainly be annoyed if he has."

He hadn't. I ran into the dressing-room of one of the Englishmen that night to chatter a little while he made up. He had a Japanese kimono on, and it was a little incongruous with a miner's beard, but we never think of those things in the theatre. The dresser discreetly withdrew—they always have a way of doing that—but I was asking the player nothing worse than which would have been totally ruined, the young man or the young woman, if we had

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walked together, and what I should have done had Mr. St. John Melford paid for the cab.

He, my social referee, was one of those many hundreds of British actors of good family who, since the Church has already given a shelter to one of their generation, takes the stage instead. They always have a "little money," for the truest thing in an English novel is the maiden aunt who suddenly passes away leaving Mountford and Doris enough to live on. Even so, with such obstacles to overcome as a private income and the reserve of several centuries, they make good actors, and one wonders how much better they would be if dire necessity augmented their ambitions.

As an umpire on the correct thing, the Englishman was particularly useful, and being well acquainted with our mania for reasons, often went beyond that petrifying phrase: "It isn't done."

"Of course," he said, "you could walk with me, and neither of us would be harmed. In our capacity as actors we are allowed liberties that the young unmarried men and women of the upper class are not. And even they *could* walk on the street, but then it wouldn't be quite nice. Those chaps to-day, since they entertained a

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great respect for you, showed it by putting you in a cab."

"And the hansom?" I queried. "Understand, I don't want him or any other man to pay for my cab. But what if Mr. Melford had? Should I have committed hara-kiri from the disgrace of it?"

"Oh, I shouldn't have done that," said my friend. "But there never would have been the smallest danger of his paying for your cab; he respects you far too much."

I went wearily to my room. Try as I might, the vision of a broad, clean-shaven creature rose up before me slipping surreptitious dollar bills into the willing palm of the driver, and me, pleasantly inside the cab, with no thought of hara-kiri.

Although it was late, I completed a letter which I had started a few nights before, then lost my nerve. It was not to Aaron. This was to a friend of mine—and his—the daughter of one of those families where a poor working-girl like myself could always find a welcome place at the late Sunday supper. Hester was her name—the one who took the footman to the theatre—and her father, old Charles Bateman, had fought some Wall Street battles shoulder

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to shoulder with young Aaron Adams. As a result they were fast friends; not that this was the reason for my writing Hester and asking her just how she spent her time, and just who came to Sunday supper and all about him, for I had promised that she should hear from me. So Amelia took out my letter, and as the call-boy was droning, "Overture and beginners, please," I fell upon my make-up, guiltily mindful that these grease-paint manipulations had been abridged from one hour's time to fifteen minutes as the weeks went on.

For the next fortnight I went very deeply into society. I was determined to forget everything—at least, until Hester's answer arrived. I banished Aaron completely from my mind, which wasn't very hard to do, for I couldn't imagine him at about first-cocktail time neatly drinking tea in a drawing-room full of knickknacks and women. And St. John Melford never put sugar in my cup without the picture coming into my head, although, as I said before, I immediately banished the thought with a smile. Then my constant attendant, handing me the cake, would observe:

"I say now, you're crinkling up your eyes again and your nose is wrinkling and the cor-

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ners of your mouth are turning up. Is it a hoax?"

This shows that Sinjun, as they pronounce it, and I had been getting on. Still he had not advanced with any strides, and whenever he looked as though about to take a long step forward I got sick around the heart and would put down my teacup and ask Frederica, going home in the cab, if she supposed all those women making the rounds of an afternoon had married their husbands because they were well-tubbed and used soft-soap?

Frederica, who was very deeply involved in the kangaroo man, said love was the only thing in the world, and those who couldn't get it had tea instead. Some, she went on, with a disgusting grin of happiness, had both—and I knew Frederica was thinking of herself.

Her relative, the aunt of the composer, was so strict with her that she seldom had an opportunity of seeing him alone, or, as she put it, of having her tea in peace. So I often had them over to luncheon, and sometimes Mr. Melford, too. He came very uneasily at first, but, once having done the thing, found that it could be, and wished to keep at it—which is very British.

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The two weeks passed between the sending of my letter to Hester Bateman and the day for its answer, and to my surprise her reply did not come. Then I told myself it did not catch the boat, and I would have to wait two or three days for the next mail; but it did not come then, and I feared Hester had gone to their country place on Long Island, so perhaps was not giving Sunday-night suppers at all, and could not tell me who came to them. This drove me into a sort of despairing fever, which in turn sent me flying around to more teas, as Frederica declared the rest of them were doing. And when I heard one pretty woman say she had kept ten engagements that day I knew that she must be very wretched indeed.

But what terrified me most, as I was flying about, was the uselessness of the game; I was making no headway of any kind. I did not seem any nearer to a knowledge of these English people than when I first met them.

They were perfectly courteous, cordial even, and intensely interesting if a limited variety of expressions could suggest such a state. I am inclined to think, however, that only the footmen and parlor-maids who announced me ever knew my real name; the hostesses generally let

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it be understood that I was Sarah Fall-in-the-Mud, of the Prince's Theatre, and I believe that the impression which most of them carried away was that I, a genuine half-breed, bore the rightful name of Miss Mud.

They all talked acting just as they did pictures and music. I don't know how much they knew of the last two, since I know nothing, nor shall I say, being polite, how much they knew of acting; at least, they gave it the place it deserved among the arts, and I, as a humble exponent, was grateful for that. At times I would slip away from Frederica, who would be telling an interested group of old ladies how hard it was to say the same words over night after night and keep your whole soul in it—"Come on, girls, he's going to treat," she probably referred to—and sit by myself in a corner. There was generally an old lady for me also, one who was too weak in her trembling knees to join the circle, but who would no more have missed the "At home" of a friend than she would Sunday service.

They were often pitifully garbed, if the word "pitiful" can be applied to those of a race as perfectly sure of themselves as the English; but the absolute lack of discrimination between the

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richly dressed and the poorly dressed is the finest thing to be seen in a London drawing-room. I don't believe even the old ladies minded. They knew that the blood of a Stuart raced—no, crawled—through their veins, or that Norman-French was the language their people once thought in. They knew it and every one else in the room knew it, except Miss Mud, and she didn't matter.

They were always very eager for the terrible recitations, were the Vere de Veres. They would hold their cups and saucers very quietly while some awful person would be telling us it was "On the sea and at the Hogue." Every single person would let his tea cool to do the same thing, and applaud afterward with the most wonderful dexterity. I often thought how sensible it would be to put clappers in their heels like clog-dancers, and in that way shake out a little applause while firmly grasping their teacups. I suggested this to one of the old ladies, but she said none of her people had ever danced clogs, and then tottered away.

Whenever I begin saying things I know I shouldn't I realize a crisis is approaching. If I had been able to cry out all the flippancies that were raging within me I know I would have

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felt better; but there was really no one to say them to, for I didn't want to appear ungrateful to Frederica, and besides she was growing very English, quite wrongly saying "hawndsome" and "cawn," and taking at least an Australian view of things, so I knew I would receive small sympathy from her.

What was wearing upon me most was the even deportment of all the men and women I met. At first I liked it—good manners are never to be sneered at; but as four weeks passed and Hester's letter did not come, I wondered, peevishly, how long they could maintain their reserve—and how long I could. Surely, I used to think, there must be some tempestuous hearts about, or, to go more deeply, some little romances that did not have their sum and substance in haw-haws, tinkling laughs, and rising inflections.

The daily paper proved that. Whenever the restraint of a drawing-room became insufferable I went home and devoured the divorce column, and though I am for morality I must confess that it was a relief to read of some of them who had cut loose. What most impressed me in the divorce court was that the balance of the evidence came from the servants; that my

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lord and my lady whose watchword was "appearance" would stupidly relax in their vigilance before a valet or maid, simply because they were not of their class. Since they are considered most excellent witnesses in court, I should think they would be granted a position at least on a par with that of the private detective.

Once a girl, a very pious girl, who had come on from the town where I was reared to see the East, took a day off from the rubber-neck wagons and had lunch with me. She was abnormally interested in theatrical matters, although an extremely nice girl, and before the lunch was over she produced, with a giggle of excitement, a list she had made of prominent actresses. "Now, do tell me," she said, handing the paper to me, "which of these are immoral?"

That girl and I parted hastily, yet now and then she recurred to me as I sat in a corner and watched the tide of faces, for, while my secret query was not so villanous, I felt that the day would surely come when I would politely pluck a tall blond beauty by her trailing gown and softly ask: "Say, lady, do you *ever* cut loose?"

Before that day came, however, Hester's let-

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ter did. Perhaps it was as well it did not happen on a tea afternoon. Instead, I was going to some sort of a show at the Olympia, and with no other person than Mr. St. John Melford. He was really coming for me, in a hansom, too, for he had grown very daring and took great risks with our good names.

The sun was shining, though it was chilly, and I had put on a brown velvet that Aaron loved "because it made me all one color," which was supposed to be a compliment, and it seemed very right that the letter should come when it did, with twenty minutes in which to read it. It took only five, however, and the rest was spent walking up and down the room, for while Hester's letter was long it was very easy to read—not only what was on the lines, had there been any, but what lay between them. For the first four pages she talked of her gowns; but I caught a confusion of capital A's on the fifth page, and skipped to it.

"Yes, dearest Rhoda," she wrote, "we have the same old supper-parties, and although we are late leaving town there is always a guest or two. I really believe that Aaron Adams has been here every Sunday for eleven weeks" (I had been away eleven), "and of course he is the

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usual delight. Father *is* so fond of him. He sits at my right hand during supper; you used to sit there, didn't you? And we have pleasant times, just the two of us, while the others talk stocks. He won't discuss business on Sunday, you know, so we tell each other what we're going to do when we're 'grown-ups.' He said he was going to have a certain farm-house on Long Island, and so was I; but when we came to compare notes we found it was the same place. Father said there was only one thing for us to do after that—father *is* so fond of him—and I want you to know him better than you did, Rhoda, as of course you will, for we've all decided that this is a world of few friends, and that we who care for one another must keep close together. Father said this at our last supper—Aaron Adams mixed the mint juleps—for we go down to the country this week. Of course, you and I can't keep very close together just now; but Aaron Adams is coming down often, as father *is* so *fond* of him and I want my dear old daddy to have a good summer with all his friends about. We are all so proud of your success. I asked Aaron Adams if he wasn't glad to know such an *artiste*, and he said, 'An *artiste*? Well, that

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wouldn't be my reason,' in that droll way he has, for you know he never will give you strollers the place you deserve, and—"

But it went on like this for six more pages, and after I had walked from wreath to wreath on the Early Victorian carpet, saying awful things about Hester in the centre of each wreath, Bunny came.

I had intended to be perfectly nice to Mr. Melford. I knew that he was in no way to blame because his ancestors had been repressed for centuries, nor was it his fault that Aaron sneered about my being an artist, nor that Hester Bateman was a false friend. Of course, Hester was not supposed to know that I used to see a great deal of Aaron Adams during the week, but one would think after the letter I wrote her, asking her to tell me just who came to supper and how he looked, that she might suspect.

But no, heedless, cruel, indifferent to any one but herself, she attacked me with all the subtle deadliness of a submarine undermining an armored cruiser. A submarine! No, nothing so exquisite. A sleek little mole, rather, burrowing to the heart of—well, of an Indian turnip.

Exhausted with my silent category, I leaned

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back in the cab and closed my eyes. "I like you best this way," said Mr. Bunny Melford. "You are so quiet and so gentle."

Then I opened my eyes and looked at him from across an unfathomable gulf of misunderstanding, and yet he was so near that he could have taken my hand and placed it under his own, on his knee, as Aaron had done. A wave of naughtiness swept over me. "Would you still like me if I hung over those doors and screamed?"

Mr. Melford at first roared loudly, but, catching a wild gleam in my eye, stopped short—he could stop at any time, the roaring—and exclaimed, with some fear in his voice: "But you wouldn't do that, would you?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I'm thinking seriously of doing it."

"We will soon be there," he soothed. He was not a conceited man, and this should have made me behave; but I flounced about a little, and the poor fellow continued his attempts to calm me.

"What a nice fur thing!" he commented.

"It's feathers," I replied.

"Is it, really? Looks like fox. Ah, good old huntun' season!"

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"Do you hunt?"

"Ra-ther."

"Don't you think it's poor sport? A hundred against one."

"Oh, I say, Miss Miller!"

"Well, isn't it?"

"How could it be? Why, we've done it for centuries."

"You mean because you English do it that it must be good sport?"

"Precisely. How clearly you see things!"

I flounced around some more.

"They're rodents, you know," he calmed.

"I don't care!" I shouted, from across the abyss of our various viewpoints. "If they must be destroyed, then you should shoot them."

"Hush!" said Sinjun, looking nervously around. "Don't ever say that again, I beg of you. It's shockun', it's—it's rank heresy; besides, the foxes like it."

We were very quiet for a little while. I hoped that I was going to be good and to forget about the letter, and not take it out on Mr. Melford; but I was most fidgety inside of me, and at last I pinched him gently on the arm. He jumped, and turned to me inquiringly. I lowered my voice.

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"Suppose I scream in my sleeve for a second? What do you think? It would be a great relief to me."

Mr. Melford's alarm increased; poor soul, he had thought it was all over.

"Oh, I say, do you feel that bad? But, then, I wouldn't scream if I could help it, not even in my sleeve; it's—it's—"

"Not done?"

"Exactly; it's not done."

"There has to be a first time for everything," I commented, recklessly. "The trouble with you Englishmen is you take no initiative. Now, if I just quietly screamed like this" (I lifted my arm to my face).

Mr. Melford reached for the glass, and endeavored to pull it down to deaden the sound; his face was very stern; but before he had solved its intricacies, Olympia loomed up before us, and, with the same idea as when distracting a child, he pointed to it.

"See, see!" he exclaimed, madly—"see the big building!"

"Yes," I said, dropping my arm, "it is imposing, isn't it?" There was no use. It takes two to make a good "pretend," and even with the thought egging me on of Hester and Aaron

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playing "grown-ups" I felt I could not continue in the game with Bunny.

"Best thing for the nerves in the world," assured Mr. Melford, greatly relieved—"space, height, width, don't you know, relaxin', relievin'."

He stretched his hand across the unfathomable gulf and helped me out. I looked into his face and smiled apologetically. Like the gentleman that he was, he did not show the disgust he must have felt, and I'm glad I smiled, for that was the last time I ever looked squarely at him.

We approached the turnstiles with the booking-offices on either side, and as I stepped back for him to buy our seats he fumbled for a second in his pocket and produced a card.

"I have a pass," he said, "and must go through another gateway. I'll meet you on the other side; but you book your seat here. Have your four shillin's ready."

The turnstile clicked once, and found me at the small window. I stared bewildered at the inquiring officer. "Four shillings, madam, thank you," said the officer, to make it easier. In a trance I dug for my small purse and deposited the money. "Thank you," he repeated.

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Once more the turnstile clicked, and I was emptied into the building.

From a distance I saw St. John Melford coming toward me, but with his head turned to exchange a greeting with some friend. He seemed farther off than the fifty feet that lay between us, and I felt that if he and I were to walk side by side through life we would still be miles apart. A portly man squeezed by me to slip into the outgoing turnstile. "Sorry," he murmured. Light came to me in a flash. "Sorry, too," I answered back, and squeezed into the turnstile with him. In the shadow of his greatness I was clicked out into the day again. I just caught the hansom that had brought us there. "Go on," I shouted—"quick!"

He went on for an hour, while all alone I laughed and cried and answered back—yes, and screamed in my sleeve; for I had at last cut loose.

IX

I HAD a long talk with my social referee that night, and I must say that he behaved very humanly and laughed off his beard several times.

"Now, had you been with me," he explained, "of course, knowing you as well as I do, I could have paid your way in."

This made me very fiery. "You would have done nothing of the sort," I declared. "You and I are comrades—we work together, draw salaries together, and when I go out with a member of the company I expect to pay my share. Every actress feels as I do; that's one of the joys of being an actress. Why, if we allowed the men in the company to buy our late suppers, for instance, we wouldn't be able to go out with them when we wanted to, but have to hang about looking hungry, and wait for an invitation just like those poor, dependent females who don't work for a living."

The umpire modified his statement.

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"I meant it would be no sign of disrespect for me to have put the four shillings in your hand or to have slipped the money to the gate people. And I'm sure"—a little guiltily—"before my wife and I were married, even though we were in a company together, that I paid for her supper."

"Of course you did," I rejoined. "That's because she was ceasing to be a comrade and was becoming something dearer, if—if there can be anything dearer," I gulped, "than to be a man's comrade."

"You'll know better some day," interrupted the Englishman at this, but quietly.

"Anyway," I rushed on, to check his train of thought, or mine, "there's nothing more interesting to the outsider than to watch the delicate transition from comrades to sweethearts. You know this always happens on the road at home. New York is not conducive to match-making in a company."

"Too much Lambs' Club," chuckled the referee.

"Yes," I assented. "It's a regular society for the prevention of marriages. But to go on, I do love to watch the dears. First she and he go out with the rest of us, and after one man

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has paid for the whole supper we sit around the table and figure out what we owe individually and what is our share of the tip. Even at that period he may have the change if she hasn't, and she has to make him take it the next day 'or I shall never go out again,' she threatens. Then after a little while, through some strategy on his part, they get a table by themselves, and at first she is loudly insistent on paying her share. We can hear her clear across the room, but it doesn't impress us in the least. We know that after a few more weeks of loneliness, of walking to the theatre together, and of stopping to look at the homes where the shades are still up and coal fires blazing, we know that they will finally decide to walk on together through life—through life—think what a rash statement that is! Anyway, after that he always pays for her supper—as he should—and cuts down on his drinks to do it."

The Briton nodded reminiscently as he put more spirit gum on his beard.

"I needn't go on," I added. "I suppose it's about the same over here. It would be just the same wherever actors are."

"Yes," said the Englishman. "A certain

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mutual appreciation attracts us, propinquity makes the way easy, and that blazing fire through a plate-glass window brings to a crisis our longing for domesticity. The difference between your country and ours is that we get it."

"Get what?"

"Domesticity."

"Yes, you do," I admitted. For I knew he had a home in the country and open fires and babies. "But don't you think we get it, too?"

"Not so likely," he responded. "You have to rush about so. I'm not sure," he dared, "that you care for it."

"Yes, I do! I do! I do!" I responded, passionately.

"I say," he laughed, "been looking at coal fires lately?"

We both laughed at this—I more loudly than, upon reflection, was necessary. I didn't want him to know that I had no one to look at coal fires with.

"But surely," he pursued, going back to St. John Melford, "you sent him some message?"

"Oh yes," I responded. "I didn't dare go to my lodgings, though, for fear I'd find him there. But I sent him telegrams in all direc-

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tions, and I dined in the Savoy grill with Larry." Then I laughed very easily. "You know, I made up a 'pretend.' I had to have one to explain my extraordinary conduct."

It was so nice not to translate "pretends" to my player friend. He understood. "What did you say?" he urged.

"Well, I just said: 'Obliged to leave. Felt a scream coming on.'"

At this my referee would have had his beard all to do over again if Amelia hadn't come to the door and begged pardon, but it was well that the royalties wuz to be in front or I'd be *that* late. So he forced his beard back on with a towel, and said he had thought we were late ringing in. And after the ways of royalties were explained to me, and how the managers do not begin the overture until the arrival of the party, no matter how late—which they generally aren't, being a punctilious people—this is fragmentary, but the way I got it—I started toward my room.

"Well, I'm through with teas," I concluded, "and all Bunnies."

But at this the Englishman grew a little severe with me.

"I doubt if you'll find another," he said,

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rather warmly. "The insular Briton is more rare than you Americans admit. And as for this 'not-being-done' reason you are always dwelling upon, it's mostly rot. Englishmen, as a class, are the most independent people in the world. It may be because they are so sure of themselves—I don't deny that form of racial conceit; but if they follow in the footsteps of their ancestors unquestioningly, it's because they want to."

I couldn't fight back my Englishman, for the picture rose before me of a scene in Piccadilly that very afternoon as I was driving about. It was only a cart-horse—well taken care of, as they all are here, but with too heavy a load for a slippery hill—being assisted up the grade by one messenger boy, a cabman, two costers, and a big, gaunt Englishman in a silk hat who had just stepped out from his club. With a "one, two, three, push!" all hands were turning the spokes of the wheels, and splattering along through the mud. There wasn't the smallest to-do about it, and when the cart had reached the top of the hill the clubman pulled out his stick, which he had thrust among the merchandise, slapped the mud off his gloves, and lifted his hat to a lady bowing from a coroneted

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carriage. Had there been another of his class with him it could have been looked upon as a lark, but he was mightily alone and didn't care tuppence for any one.

So I told my friend this, feeling that sharp pain in my nose which we are apt to suffer when touched by very human elements, and he in turn, pretending not to notice my tears, suddenly advised me to come down into the country for the summer. "I think you're a bit seedy," he added.

"I guess I am," I said, the thought of cool green acres growing very sweet to me; and then Amelia begged pardon again, but she wouldn't be responsible. And even as she washed her hands of the whole affair, there was a burst of chords and the band swung into "God Save the King," so that we knew his Majesty had arrived.

On any other night I should have been quite mad with excitement over playing before this most beloved of all monarchs, and even with the events of the day rampant in my mind I became very shaky before I made my entrance. Amelia was quite calm about it, however, having played before royalty a number of times—meaning that her ladies had—and found them

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most pleasant and willin'. She said the fireman told her the box that is always reserved for the royalties had been bought by some tourist, but, as is the custom when sold to another, the address of the patron is taken, so that he may be notified and the money returned should royalty want it. And the fireman told Amelia that the patron had been very mad about it, and said such a thing could never have happened in America. Which made me wonder if some Americans could be termed insular, or peninsular, or what.

Frederica was in a fearful state. She insisted upon wearing her new spring hat in the dance-hall, and—so Larry claimed afterward—spoke all her lines with an English accent, or, rather, with Frederica's idea of an English accent. I borrowed a knife from one of the stage-hands and cut two holes in a canvas boulder for Mr. Benny and me to peep through. Mr. Benny was too well trained to be guilty of such vandalism, but he didn't mind looking.

"See him now," he would whisper to me. "He is laughing. Think of a king laughing!"

"He laughed out loud during your scene," I whispered back.

Mr. Benny very nearly fell through the

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bowlder. "You don't mean it!" he exclaimed. "A king laughing at me! And out loud! Now, when you go on"—kindly retaliating—"I'll watch, and I'll tell you everything he does."

"Do," I urged. So Mr. Benny and I kept tabs on the royal personage throughout the play—that is, when we could force Bella and Frederica from our peep-holes. And all of us told one another just how he "took" our scenes, and fortunately for all he took them very well. He was the first to laugh at the humorous lines and the quickest to sober down when the situation was serious. We all felt the charm of his rotund presence, Frederica even going so far as to say, "And I see, now, how so many women—" And then she rolled her eyes significantly, which exuberant burst was beaten into her ears for many a day afterward.

All through the evening my inner self was saying ridiculous things as I spoke my lines, addressing them to the King, as of course an inner self should. "Do you see her, King?" was my train of thought. "Well, a man named Aaron Adams has refused her. There, now you're laughing—that's just the outside of her you're laughing at; you would feel sorry for the inside of the shell. Then there's a girl named

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Hester—now we must stop a minute while she lands that laugh properly; it's very ticklish. Yes, she did it; we all have to work together for that laugh. Hester is her name—a false friend. Did you ever have a false friend? Of course not. You always win. Or are they the ones we do not hear about—the ones you do not win? Anyway, you go on smiling and being kind, and that's what I must do. You play at king and I play at Indian—just a second, please, I must catch Bella's eye; sometimes she's slow, sometimes she's—I got it, so did your Majesty—and the audience, which doesn't always happen. Catching some one else's eye on the stage means trouble ahead. It has nothing to do with dexterity. I suppose you have caught a few eyes yourself in your day, but you must have had to do it far more carefully than I, for you're a king, and sovereignty doesn't come off with cold cream as does an Indian, and—oh, did your box start that hand? How splendid! But it doesn't heal this wound of mine a bit. How curious that it doesn't! Now, once upon a time—quick, here's my change! What am I thinking about? Amelia—”

And so I went on crazily through the evening, and since all the others must have been

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just as busy shaping their foolish inner thoughts, I wondered which was the real drama—the stage story we were presenting, or our own, which we were hiding.

Despite the rioting of my fancies, there was little indulgence in this levity when I offered the bouquet to the Royal Princess in the party. For that's just what I did—presented a bouquet. Looking back upon it, there was no particular reason for offering the Princess ten guineas' worth of white orchids beyond that she had lately become engaged; at least, that was the excuse the management made when they suggested to one of his Majesty's equerries that the company wished to do so, and the King sent back word that he and the Princess would receive Miss Sarah Fall-in-the-Mud at the end of the play. Bella said this naming me was a great relief to her, as she knew her mother would be nervous if she heard she had been summoned before the King, and at the time I was unhappy over the choice myself.

I told the equerry that I hadn't the smallest idea what to do, and would probably faint on his Majesty's shirt-front, but he comforted me by saying I would find myself among the simplest people in the world. All I had to do was

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to curtsy when I entered the box, and if the King offered his hand to curtsy again as I took it, and once more to the Princess. Then I was to wait until his Majesty addressed me, and in answering I should call him first your Majesty, and after that, if there was any after that, to say "Sir." To the Princess I was to say "your Royal Highness," and I was to back out of the box when the King bade me good-bye.

"I think I can get in all right," I told the gentleman-in-waiting, "but I shall probably never be able to back up those three steps leading from the box. I shall simply sit down on the first one and be pulled out by some one discreetly lurking in arrear."

"You'll manage all right," smiled the equerry. "I'll be by your side in case anything goes wrong. Have you your speech ready for her Royal Highness?"

I said that I had it as ready as it ever would be, and a little readier possibly than later on, and I tried it on him very successfully. I wasn't happy through the last act, but, like a first night, the great terror rolled away when the moment came. I made my first curtsy on the second step, which was nothing short of miraculous, and I am not at all sure if the gentleman-in-

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waiting said anything by way of introduction, for the first thing I saw was the monarch removing his glove that he might politely offer his hand to Miss Sarah Fall-in-the-Mud, and I knew it wasn't because he wanted to keep the Indian stain of my hands off his white kids, either.

"We have greatly enjoyed the whole play and your own performance, Miss Miller," he said.

Think of his going to the trouble of hunting up my name on the sixpenny programme!

The equerry kicked my foot.

"I thank your Majesty," I replied, "in the name of the company as well as for myself, for your graciousness in coming to see us strangers in a strange land, and I beg that I may present these flowers to her Royal Highness."

I think the King said "surely"—certainly not "sure"; then the Princess extended her hand, and I curtsied as she said: "Are they really for me? How sweet!"

At this I managed to ejaculate: "We beg to present them with our respectful good wishes for the future happiness of your Royal Highness."

"Oh, thank you," said the Princess, "and thank them."

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And the King said: "Very nice, indeed, Miss Miller; very kind. Come to our country often."

At which I replied: "Thank you, Sir, I should like to."

Then the King and Princess both suddenly turned their backs, looking down into the stalls, and I saw that the equerry was making little roundabout quirks with his finger which I realized meant that I need not have to back up the steps, after all, as the royalties were giving me an opportunity of walking out nose foremost. So I fled to the company and told them all about it, thanking the gentleman-in-waiting for "holding the book on me." And when I drove home past the King's house I felt that it was very pleasant to know a neighbor. Still, there was little of his Majesty in my mind, but a longing for cool, green stretches, long days on the river, and the getting away from myself.

I started out early the next morning to look for a place in the country, my efforts to make haste being greatly retarded by the assiduities of the landlady, Cissy, and the cook. I was confused over this until I discovered that my fame was heralded in the *Morning Post*. Landladies all read the "Court Circular" and every move of the royalties, just as they read their

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prayer-book—only with a good deal more enjoyment. I finally invited them all in, and gave a true version while Cissy fastened my boots. The landlady stood it very well, having once boarded a lady-in-waiting; but Cissy never entirely recovered, and all my previous friendly efforts to treat her as a human being went for nothing after my close association with the King.

Even so, by eleven I was at the station, racing from one end of it to another, and telling my life's history to every policeman until I found the right number of the right platform. Since I was not yet a seasoned commuter, I did not select my carriage, and then, closing the door, drape myself through its window as though defying any one to invade its sanctity. Nor did I attempt to look like ten people and distribute my wraps all over the seats, as though the owners had just stepped out to look after their luggage. As a result the carriage was filled by a young lady, packages, her maid, and a huge dog.

The young lady popped in at the last moment, saying, "You don't mind dogs do you, madam?" but pulling in the beast without waiting for a reply. And while I didn't object to the large

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creature with its head in its mistress's lap and his tail flapping in and out of my face, I wondered what the young lady would have said had I done so. She would probably have been "sorry," and Fido's tail would have continued flapping.

The ticket man came along and had a look at our tickets to see if we were on the right train, thanking us because we were, and there was some bell-ringing and green-flagging, and then the doors began to slam—which is a noise like nothing else in the world, and absolutely European in suggestion—and we were off. The young lady removed her best gloves and put on some shabby ones—and yet she kept a maid—and I retired behind a *Post*, figuratively speaking, until the large dog tried to curl up in my lap. This was a mark of favor, so the two women intimated, and to such an extent that I scarcely had the courage to disturb the portion of him which did finally succeed and descend from the carriage when my station was reached.

The social referee had followed up his suggestion the night before by kindly urging me to stay down in his part of the country so that I could run in on his "missis," when I grew lone-

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ly, and play with his "nipper"—coster talk is a sort of agreeable affectation here in England, as is the introduction of our Bowery dialect at home; but I wanted to be near the river, and as Frederica would be spending her Sundays with other relatives of hers near Walton, I decided upon that locality.

Wise from my previous experiences, I was not looking for chintz or Georgian chairs, but I did reasonably expect rooms of good size and a garden, if not a "view." I abandoned the view and the garden as the day wore on, but still clung to comfortable rooms. There were one or two villas that suggested comfort where the householders took "paying guests," which meant a welcoming—if my references were good—to the hearth and home upon the payment of a sum calculated to keep that home in comfort. I hesitated at one of the villas, for the sun was coming cheerily in, until the hostess sought to lure me by the assurance "that I would never be alone." And at this threat I found it was too far from the station, walking on farther hastily.

It was thus I came upon Rosemary Lane, when I had finished the list given me by the estate agent, and was starting in to enjoy myself. I sauntered along Rosemary Lane be-

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cause I liked the name, and I might have walked to the end of it, coming out upon the river, had my eyes not been attracted by a sign announcing the sale of Ayredale puppies. This was evidently to be a dog day with me, and I speculated—picking the hairs of the large train dog from off my skirt that the puppies might not be jealous—just what this would signify in a dream book. Through the hedge I caught a glimpse of a story-and-a-half gabled cottage—the kind with more room inside than one could believe possible from the outside, like the feeding capacity of little boys—and without further reflection I was a-goin' up the walk and a-knockin' at the door.

I believe I had some remote idea of arranging my *raison d'être* before the maid would come from the back yard, as, of course, she would be playing with the dogs. But ere the echo had died away, from around the house, prefaced by puppies and epilogued by them, came a lady—unmistakably that—wearing a short skirt, a heavy bib apron, and an inquiring look. It was a little sudden, and I think I can be forgiven my stammering speech.

“I just knocked,” I said, “to ask if you, or whoever has it—that is, the cottage—keeps

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anything else besides dogs—meaning, of course, lodgers.”

The lady lifted her brows. “Lodgers?”

“Yes, I see you have dogs. You have rooms, too?” I was getting desperately mixed, but the lady smiled, not politely, but as though she saw it were really funny. This encouraged me. “I began wrong,” I apologized. “I liked your house and the puppies, and I want rooms. If you haven’t rooms I think I’ll take a puppy”—they were twining about me lovingly—“but I’d like both if you can manage it.”

The lady looked at me thoughtfully. “I suppose I ought to take lodgers, oughtn’t I?”

Visions of the other summer boarders I had met at the other houses rose up before me. “Lodger, not lodgers,” I hastened to say.

“I’ve an extra sitting and bed room,” she went on, “that I could very well do without. Would you like to see them?”

I told the lady I would, and I tried to be very calm when I saw they were chintz-hung and Georgian-chaired. I liked the householder, but still the English are good at a bargain, especially the ladies, so “How much are they?” I asked, languidly, looking out of the window at

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a view and a garden at the same time, but pretending not to care for them.

"How much should they be?" replied the lady.

At this I crinkled up my eyes and laughed—as did the lady also—fears of her craftiness having fled. "Don't you know?" I asked.

"No, I don't," she responded. "I know about dogs and how much they should cost, but I've never taken lodgers, or been in lodgings, I may add, and yet I feel that I ought. I'm not a rich woman."

There was something so simple and fine about her statement that I loved her immediately. "I've seen rooms not nearly so nice around here," I then said, "for twenty-five shillings a week, so I think you should charge thirty-five—"

But I got no further, for she stopped me with: "Oh, really, no, I couldn't; I only pay twenty shillings a week for the whole cottage."

"But that would include service and lights and my tub," I urged, feeling that it was all twisted like a comic opera, but intent upon seeing justice done.

"It would be pleasant," said the lady, relaxing, "for then I could afford a maid, and I

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would get a good one who understood waiting on lodgers, otherwise you'd have a fearful time. Are you difficult to cater to?"

Of course, I didn't tell the lady that wasn't a customary question; but I let it be understood right at the start that if pressed cabbage was brought to me, I would get under the table and not come out. And she wasn't at all alarmed, but smiled comprehendingly and said she would get under with me, as she had lived a number of years on the Continent and couldn't endure English greens.

It was all so unorthodox, our arrangement, that I had gone some way from the house—after depositing a pound, not because she demanded it, but because I did, fearing she'd change her mind—I had gone some way from the house, I repeat, before I remembered she didn't know my profession; so I went back, though unwillingly, and called over the hedge, jocularly, "How about the references?" meaning how about my own.

Then the lady suddenly turned very white and said, quickly: "Who sent you back?" And I said: "Why, no one; but I must tell you I'm an actress."

At this the color came back into her face.

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"Oh," she answered, "I don't care. And I'll send you to my old priest if you want one of me. I'm not a Catholic, but we both love dogs."

"I don't want any references," I scoffed. "Didn't I say I was an actress!" Which, of course, I didn't mean, but the lady understood; and then I flew for my train, and was so happy over the prospect of getting out into the country and away from my London self—as though a self doesn't stay the same wherever one takes it, but I had yet to learn that—I didn't bother in the least over the lady's turning white. Indeed, it wasn't until we had begun skimming over the chimney-pots of London that I remembered I didn't know her name or the number of her house, and all I could tell the company was that the address *might* be Mrs. Ayredale, Puppy Villa, Rosemary Lane, and to come down on Sundays.

Well, I suppose I am not the only one who has pressed her grief into the background by keeping very busy in the foreground, face all smiles and back of head all twisted wires. I don't want to advise others, but the next time I have a sorrow like the one of that summer—I called it "Hester's treachery" for weeks—I am

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not going to preserve it by shutting it off from the light, where it lies dormant and gathers strength. I wonder, now, I did not get some metaphorical comfort out of the memory of my childhood's cough.

A grief is just like a cough. They told me when I was little and suffered through long Sunday sermons, with a bad cold adding to my misery, that if I would fight back my cough I would not only be an onward Christian soldier, but I would the sooner recover from it—the cough, not the soldier. As a result, I permitted myself none of the agreeable sensations of rippling my bronchial tubes gently whenever I felt ticklish, and getting lozenges passed to me, but, with eyes bulging out and tears streaming, would fight the demon until, suddenly, with a terrific explosion of pent-up barking, it would rush into the foreground and I would be led from the church—a shamed thing.

I had always talked so much of the actor enjoying any kind of a sensation that I was beginning to feel a little uneasy over my position as a real artist when I found myself getting so little joy out of Hester's death-dealing letters. I think now that the quality which is pleasurable to us must be the stimulus accruing from

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our own emotions. Now Hester's letters could not be called a stimulus; they were numbing. Several came before the *great* one arrived, because, of course, I had to be polite and answer her. I asked myself sometimes why I invited these attacks, but even so, I am sure this torture was not sweet torture. I told myself that I wrote not at all to read Aaron Adams' name, but just to see how far a false friend would go, and it was scandalous to see how far she *could* go and still be a perfectly respectable young girl.

In answer to her first letter I spoke of my cough. There is always something pathetic about the expression "my cough," as though it were a sort of a Camille-like growth caught in the third act, and not from taking out one's lace yoke and the weather turning cold. Anyway, she answered it promptly. The letter came with a whole sheaf of others at the end of a *matinée*, just as I was going out to dinner. I went back to my dressing-room with them, for I saw Hester's handwriting on top, and I thought it would be better not to shout out dreadful things about her in a restaurant. I tossed the others on my dressing-table and went at hers. It was just as bad as I had expected, and it was

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even worse, for she sympathized with me, sort of pretending all the time that she was sorry about my "cough."

"You dear girl," she said, among other insults—"you dear old girl, coughing away from us in that damp climate. I told Aaron"—she didn't say Aaron Adams any more—"who is staying with us, the minute dinner was over. We had such a jolly time at dinner I didn't want to bring up anything so miserable then, and he threw his cigar into the grate, for any friend of his friends is a friend to him, and he said: 'Has she got any of her Speedwell's tincture with her?' And I said how funny that was that he should *feel* that, for *I* knew you used to take a great deal of it, and he must have read my mind—wasn't it curious? I told him of the coincidence, which made him laugh, and he gripped my hand and said, 'The dear, dear child,' this being very affectionate in a drawing-room with eight lamps going, though it shows, too, that he feels I am a silly. But he had a correct, far-away look in his eye, and laughed easily when father came in and caught us. 'I doubt if she has it, or even the prescription,' I answered, so he has gone to his room to get his copy to send you while I am rushing off

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these few lines. We are all so happy here, we wish—”

But I knew she didn't care a bit whether I was dead or not, even with the chance for my cough to dry up in their hot air, and the only other thing about the letter which interested me was the postscript: “I needn't have kept my letter open, after all, for the prescription, as Aaron forgot and sealed it up in an envelope by itself. This is just as well, perhaps, as my letter would then be overweight; and he now flaps it down on my desk, asking me to address it, which is very lazy of him, for I could easily tell him where you're playing, and—see that blot!—he is joggling my elbow to make me hurry so that he can get this to you by return mail. Isn't he a thoughtful creature? He knows how fond I am of you. Good-bye, lamb child. Your Hester.”

Finishing this I swished madly through my red-cornered mail until I found the blue corner with Hester's handwriting on it, only this time hurried and blotted upon the envelope. Then I grew white and chilly and angry and choky, for I held the letter up to the strong light and deciphered Aaron's heavy pen-strokes criss-crossing enough paper to have written a dozen

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prescriptions. I wanted to open it. Oh, how I wanted to! And I wouldn't open it, for I despised the trick he was playing on me, and I felt Aaron's clasp of Hester's hand, the pet phrase, and the playful joggling of her elbow, and I would not read what he would doubtless take such joy in telling me.

All memory of Aaron's unfailing kindness had been swept away in his cruel cable. Like a painter who had lost his perspective and goes on making foolish brush-strokes, I went on adding to my folly by quick strokes of my pen, as in another envelope I readdressed his unopened letter to his office. As I was about to blot it Mr. Benny appeared in the doorway, a little querulous over my long delay, for he was to take me out to dinner—not a "Dutch treat" at all, but a two-and-six party, in exchange for the Sunday I had given him on the river. So I left the letter to dry and hurried out with him, putting my grief—resentment, alas!—among the twisted wires in the back of my head.

It turned out to be a serious meal, for we talked a great deal of lost opportunities, Mr. Benny telling me how much money he would be worth if he had bought a lot in Seattle twenty

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years ago for three hundred and fifty dollars—and he had the money, too, only a friend advised him—and I telling Mr. Benny if we would just trust to our own intuitions, and not to false friends who muddled things up, how not only rich but happy we would all be. Afterward there was some asking of Mr. Benny how he “got back” at his friend, and at this Mr. Benny, looking surprised, replied that there was no happiness in getting back at any one—small methods made the man smaller, and there was no torment like being smaller than the fellah you hate. Then followed business of me rising hastily and saying that I had to go back to read a letter, and that I believed he was right, and I *did* want to do the big thing, and would he mind; and Mr. Benny telling me to go on, for he knew I was bothered.

So I went on, jostled my way, the distance too short to take a cab, too long to walk, and when I reached the red post-box in front of the theatre with “London and Abroad” painted above the slit, I saw Amelia dropping a blue-stamped envelope therein. “Amelia!” I shouted, but it had disappeared.

“I ’opes I ain’t done wrong,” Amelia answered to my shout. “I saw hit ready on

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the table, and the post closes before aight, miss."

I couldn't answer her, for it was not she who had done the wrong. But from that time I made brave efforts not to ask myself why this intuition of which I boasted hadn't prompted me to take a cab, and tried to quell any rebellion with sage bits, such as: "What's done can't be undone," or "Whatever is, is right."

A maxim that did much to soothe me during those long days in the country was that "Nature never did desert the heart that loved her." I meant Nature, too, not Aaron. And I really loved it, and that's what troubled me—it was too good to waste alone. This is a conviction I shall never outgrow, and I don't believe there is anything sadder than a full moon shining on a spinster. I said this to Frederica one day. She had come over from the house of her first cousin once removed, and was visiting the kennels with me.

"I don't think they see the moon," returned Frederica, "or they wouldn't be spinsters."

Frederica wore a new ring on her right hand, thinking to mislead people by it, and had evidently been noticing the moon very hard, which made me cross. "That's ridiculous," I said.

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"I saw the moon from my car window all the way out last night, and there were two stunning men in the railway carriage."

"Well, what happened?"

"Nothing. They had been to see our play, and were commenting on my ugliness. One of them said I might not be so hideous off the stage, and the other said I couldn't change *that* face; he'd know me anywhere."

"And you didn't tell him?"

"Of course not. I stared at the moon and they stared at me, and the sleuth at recognitions said to the other as they got out: 'Rather sweet, eh?' That was all."

"It was almost a romance," sighed Frederica.

"Yes," I replied, "as near as an insult could be. Let's take the puppies into the garden."

The little boy and girl dogs were a great joy to me in spite of the moon. Mrs. Erskine—it wasn't Ayredale, after all—let me name the whole litter; so the poor sickly one getting the worst of it I called Sarah Fall-in-the-Mud, and a fine boy puppy which had things all his own way was named Aary. This Mrs. Erskine said was very nice, being an Ayredale; though, of course, that wasn't *my* reason. Then besides Larry and Benny there was a mean, sleek little

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girl dog that was always sneaking up and getting the best bone, the while looking perfectly innocent, which was quickly dubbed Hester. She was a contemptible creature, though Mrs. Erskine declared she was really the best-bred of the lot, and I said: "No doubt, as she looks more like a wiry-haired pig than any of them." And that was the only time a coolness ever fell between me and my landlady.

"Aren't they dear?" I said to Frederica. One had been named after her, and the kangaroo man had bought it, although it was still boarding with mother. "Do you know it gives me a sort of thrill to see that little thing creeping into your arms. I know just how its body feels."

Frederica looked at me gravely. "You shouldn't feel that way about dogs, Rhoda. That is the way a woman should feel about a child."

I returned her look frankly. "But I never do, Frederica. I have never had much to do with babies, you know."

"It's not from experience; it should be an instinct."

"And do you feel it, Frederica?"

The color came into her face. "I have, of late," she said, steadily.

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"Dear old Frederica," I returned, after a pause, "I don't think I quite understand. I know my work and beautiful comradeship, but I'm a little mixed about the other things in life which make a woman happy. You see, I've never chanced to go deeply into anything but acting. Why, of late, even with all the beauty of this place entrancing me, I am so glad when I get on my make-up I could shout."

"That isn't right," said Frederica, decidedly. "That makes four hours against twenty. You don't get enough out of your day. Why can't you get some joy from the real moon and the calcium one, too?"

"I tried to," I confessed, with a ragged little laugh. "But it seems I must choose between the real moon and the pretend one, and I do so love them both." That was the nearest I had ever come to confessing to Frederica. "And it seems so dreadful to me," I continued, more bravely, having once begun, "that a man can pretend to love a woman and yet make her give up what means so much to her."

"The calcium moon?"

"Yes."

"That's a wrong way of looking at the sub-

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ject. One must *want* to give it up; if it's a case of *make*, she can't care much for him."

"You think she can't?" I was growing hopeful over this. Perhaps some one didn't love a certain person, after all!

But Frederica crushed me. "Of course, it's impossible to love the stage the same way one would a man." Strange, that was of Aaron's wisdom! "But I don't see if an actress is lucky enough to love one of her own kind why she can't go on with both. Of course, I wasn't able to choose. Hugh"—the kangaroo man—"is my affinity — worlds couldn't keep us apart. But if I were you, Rhoda, I'd look for those who love both kind of moons, and would let you, too. Keep among your own, Rhoda; they will respect your work and not bar you from it."

"You don't mean Larry?" I exclaimed, suspiciously.

"Heavens, no; I mean—I mean I don't mean any one." All of a sudden wary. "Of course, when I give up the stage there won't be any tentacles hanging on to it to keep me there. I am one of the failures, but I don't care a smidgeon. I'm going on to better things."

"No one's a failure who has made the stage finer by being on it," I put in, positively. And

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Frederica, pleased but moist, was about to burst into sobs when the click of the garden gate introduced the kangaroo man, the first cousin once removed, and the composer, who was the nephew of the first cousin, and therefore Frederica's second cousin once removed—or some other difficult thing—and the Farquhars.

They were all coming to have early "meat-tea" with me, which being interpreted means no dinner and the need of a hearty supper after the theatre, and I was somewhat concerned, as it was my first effort toward entertaining on a large scale. Puppies are always splendid topics for opening a conversation, however, and Frederica's first cousin once removed, whose name was Mrs. Wallace—claiming a relationship with the Collection—set the ball rolling pleasantly by asking me if I had heard recently from Mr. St. John Melford.

She thought this was the right thing to do, for in her day young ladies didn't change their young gentlemen as suddenly as they do in this generation; and since I was obliged to admit that I had heard nothing beyond a note on the noon of his departure for Norway, every line in her face spelled "jilted."

This going away of Mr. Melford's, while oc-

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curring on the day following my tantrum, had not been occasioned by it. He really had intended going, although I could never make Frederica believe it. Even the kangaroo man, being very moonish at the time, was inclined to look at it romantically; but since I had never the courage to tell of my antics, I could not show Frederica his hurried letter sent in receipt of my wires. He had waited around a little, he wrote me, and upon going outside found a cabman who had seen me drive off, so he went to my lodgings and then to his club, where my wire was awaiting him, and though he veiled his real sentiments with polite regrets and twelve gardenias, he evidently thought I did well to effect an escape when I felt a scream coming on, and never suspected it was the abyss widened by the four shillings which had separated us.

So that was the end of Mr. Bunny save when Mrs. Wallace was around. It was she who had urged me into the music-room, ages back, when the composer found I was a leaf, and I think she had always resented my not going, although "The Aspen and the Zephyr" had had an excellent sale, and would have been no better had I not left to put coal on my fire.

Her eyes strayed from my spinstered condi-

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tion to the long composer in a long chair, and I found Frederica's and the kangaroo man's eyes doing the same thing. Even the puppy Hester seemed to be insinuating that I was fooling away my summer while a long composer in a long chair was so near. I almost kicked Hester as I bobbed out of my lonely seat and rushed them in to tea.

Mrs. Erskine had been asked to meet my friends, and I found her in the hall just as I was ushering the portly Mrs. Wallace into the house; indeed, she had half advanced, but not quite, for I saw my dear landlady's face change as on the day I had asked for references, and, with a swift movement of the hand indicating silence, she stepped into a curtained embrasure, and, unseeing, Mrs. Wallace passed her. I never disputed a decision of Mrs. Erskine's—she wasn't the kind to be teased; but I closed my drawing-room door when my guests were assembled, and went back into the hall.

"Won't you?" I prefaced.

She shook her head, still white. "I think not. I'm not dressed, and I'll look after things in the kitchen. Does she live in the village?"

"She's taken a river house for the summer, but she won't come here again if—"

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"Thank you."

And that was all Mrs. Erskine and I said on the subject for a long time.

"You are so wonderful," she had once remarked to me.

"We learn other things than acting on the stage," I replied, for I guessed her thoughts.

"You mean—"

"Yes; the minding of one's own affairs." And Mrs. Erskine had nodded thoughtfully.

We walked to the station, Frederica and her Australian, Mr. and Mrs. Farquhar, Meurice Wallace—for that was the composer's name—and I. Mrs. Wallace had jolted home in a pony-trap; the composer left us to go back to the river, "for there is melody in the ripples to-day"; and I went up to town with two pair of turtle-doves to watch and a letter from Hester to read.

"I'm fearfully sorry," said Bruce Farquhar, as he tossed it to me on the train. "I brought it down that you might get it a little earlier and then forgot."

So I read Hester's letter, which was short and full of excitement, for Aaron Adams had bought the farm-house, the one they both had wanted, and was going to do it all in "chintz and Geor-

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gian chairs, and everything that I think nice, and father chaffs him all the time."

I thought, as I looked out of the window, that I might not see the couples gazing at me from out their yoke of conjugality, that no matter where I stared there was this same mating going on—all Nature busily engaged in pairing off. And who was I to fight against it?—I, who loved Nature—and my work. "One of my own kind," Frederica said. How strange that I should turn to Frederica for advice, when she had always turned to me before she grew wise over this taking-of-a-husband matter! How little I was, after all, and how little I mattered except in the theatre at night! But *there* they needed me; there they couldn't do without me! Yes, I would stay on, and for the other twenty hours of the day and night I would follow the lead of my girl friends.

I dwelled on these things during the play, and watched the moon through the carriage windows on my way to Walton, and at the station I found the composer awaiting me, for "the air was full of silver notes" and he couldn't sleep. So I dismissed the fly—which never does—walking to Rosemary Lane with "one of my own kind." And the moon shone on us both.

X

I AM not sure that artists are of any one country. When Meurice, who was the composer, would behave badly, or what Mrs. Wallace would call badly — anyway, not see why we should wear clothes or why the Bible was any better than the sayings of Confucius—his aunt would lay heavy emphasis on the fact that his mother was a Hungarian and his grandmother a Damascan. Having a Damascan in the family would excuse almost anything. I had never thought of there being any modern women of Damascus. We see a few men now and then wearing queer head-dresses and selling worm-eaten embroideries at the summer resorts, but Meurice said these were not of his grandmother's class, and that was the English side of him which made the assertion.

The thing that I like about Meurice, or what I decided should be my one great reason for liking him, was the pleasant way he had of seeing things as I did, and of immediately adapt-

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ing himself to my whimsies and playing them out with me. But it was a mistake for me ever to have let him know this, and I had reason to regret it bitterly, particularly when Mrs. Erskine was around. The trouble with the composer was he never knew when to stop having whimsies, and when to give them their full fling; and simply because I showed once or twice that I was pleased with his pretends, he would indulge in them in the middle of a village street, or right before his aunt, or even while Mrs. Erskine was combing fleas off the dogs. I didn't mind so much before his aunt; she would sort of look "Damascan," and not put it down to my baleful influence. Nor did I mind his listening to a fairy whispering in his ear while I was buying stamps in the little post-office; he was more English than I was, and I would glare at the polite girl selling the stamps, and she would blush apologetically for one of her own race.

I never realized just how silly it all was until I would hear him asking Mrs. Erskine if she had seen anywhere about a nut-brown maid with witching eyes and kirtle of green, who snared men's hearts as the fowler snares a bird, and Mrs. Erskine would go on combing fleas and

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reply that if he meant Miss Miller, she was upstairs putting freckle lotion on her face. I think that Mrs. Erskine was more vigorous with the comb when Meurice was about than when he wasn't. It was one of her proud boasts that her dogs never had a flea on them, and the composer said the reason was that they were all on him.

That was the only time Mrs. Erskine ever laughed at anything my poor young man said. Sometimes when we three would be taking tea in the garden, and he would be pretending to see Puck under a plantain leaf, she would cry, irritably: "Oh, go play out your phantasies on the piano, Mr. Wallace! That is where they belong—at your fingers' ends, not your tongue's end."

Then he would call her a Philistine, but go in and play divinely, while I would watch Mrs. Erskine's stern lines relax, and a soft, beautiful look come over her face, as though she were not a woman for the kennels at all, but one to be loved and caressed, as men caress our kind.

I would then grow very proud of my composer, and think how nice it would be to have a man all my own who could make fierce creatures gentle and fill our hearts with delicious

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imaginings. This satisfaction must have been most evident one day, for Mrs. Erskine, who seems to read me like a book, pulled herself together, and, assuming her dog look once more, said, briskly: "It's all very well, my dear, but there will be some dreadful hours when the grand-piano will be silent."

I didn't tell Mrs. Erskine how hard I tried not to think of those hours, or to contrast them with other hours with other people. And at the close of every beautiful day on the river I would go up to town saying to myself how happy I was to have it all ended—ended at last—and to know where I stood and what my future would be. It never occurred to me at the time how often I had said "It is ended" as I reached the various turnings along the little life lane I trod that summer.

I think the first finish began when I bade good-bye to Aaron at the boat, and I had continued ending more or less gloriously, like Patti's farewell tours, whenever a Hester letter was received. Even at this period, when I *knew* I had reached the end and was going to be the wife of a great composer, and perhaps some day call on Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Adams at their chintz-hung Long Island farm — even at this

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period my heart would begin to beat noticeably as I entered the court which led to our stage door, and while I would be saying, "There won't be one, he'll never write again," I would be telling the old commissionnaire—oh, very facetiously: "The right letter, now, or you'll never get this shilling." And the old fellow would answer, "I 'ave it this time, miss," handing me out a fat epistle from a thin girl in the West wanting an Irish lace collar, and "I'll pay you when I see you." But at the sight of it I would have to go on acting, for my pride was great in small matters those days, so he always got the shilling.

I suppose every one else has moments when he feels a pleasant event is about to happen, when every reverberation of the car-wheels clacks out agreeable promises, when he is so sure of a letter or "something" that he doesn't walk across Waterloo Bridge as he should, admiring St. Paul's on one side of him and the Houses of Parliament on the other, nor does he even take a 'bus for a ha'penny that will land him at Somerset House with no distance to walk, but, instead, hops into a hansom right from the platform at Waterloo station, terribly mindful of the time he didn't and Amelia

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dropped the letter in. And he doesn't see anything at all until he finds the stage-doorman wagging his head and saying, "Nothing, miss"—or "sir," to stick to the sex properly—and then that's another occasion when the end has come.

Since that has happened to all of us, I needn't feel sorrow for myself, only these disappointments came at a bad time. As the summer wore on we were growing a little peevish. I didn't scold Amelia for not covering my cold cream the night before, nor tell Bruce Farquhar that he might "humor" my speech in the last act—smile at it a little, so as to give the audience the tip that they could laugh if they wished—instead of looking heroic in preparation for his own line, which forbade a titter. I was determined I shouldn't work off my excess of unhappiness on other people.

Besides, Bruce didn't refuse to "take my line" purposely; it was just one of the faults he had unconsciously fallen into as the result of a long run. We all err in this direction, and when we are very exalted in our position we resent the criticism of the little stage-manager left in charge of the play after the big one has put it on. I've sometimes seen a fine performance of a great part go to pieces by the end of

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a season, while the smaller parts were being better played, because the big actor would take no suggestions from the little manager.

We are always particularly hurt if we are told we are affecting the other actors, for I believe, while oceans can be said on the subject pro and con, fair play is the foundation of every good performance. The sense of justice must be strong within the actor, for the playing of his rôle is only one of the integral parts that make his performance a good one. He speaks lines, yes, but he must listen to more than he speaks. If he listens half-heartedly the audience, too, will lend only half attention, and that will weaken the speaker's hold upon his auditors. Then, too, at the conclusion of the other's lines, the listening actor can add conviction to the thought expressed by a smile, by a look of sympathy, by one of hate, by any quick response, whatever the emotion, that the scene may demand. An apathetic look or, more deadly, a quick gesture which distracts the eye and is foreign to the theme, will turn a pleased audience into one not quite sure of itself and a little inclined to be critical. These are the grievances that seem so small in the airing that we hesitate to speak of them; instead, we nurse our wrongs and com-

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fort ourselves with the sad thought that "if he keeps it up I can get back at him in the last act."

Women are not so apt to fight out their grievances as are men, and, immersed in my own troubles, a fortnight may have elapsed before I found that Bella was greeting me with studied politeness. Though dreading it, I forced myself to go to her dressing-room on the August night I made the discovery, carried the theatre cat in with me, made it "jump through," deplored my sunburn, remarked upon her fine skin, and finally asked what I had done. Bella wept, and the dresser stepped out.

"For weeks," she said, "there, while I am pleading to the lynchers, you have spoiled it."

"Bella! No!" I cried, in consternation. "How?"

She wailed.

"But tell me?"

"You were unfastening your bonnet-strings."

"Unfastening my strings?" I repeated, dreadful guilt creeping over me, for I must have been unconsciously preparing for my change in the wings. "Could I? Do I? Bella, no one laughs."

"No, but they are willing to. Your moving hands distract them, and they don't half listen to me."

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I could not contend against this. I knew well that when a character has thoroughly established herself as being funny an audience looks for a laugh in every move, and I knew at last why Bella swept up the stage in the third act before I had finished my long speech to her, which, in turn, had made me go nightly to my dressing-room to tell Amelia that the world was full of pigs.

Bella and I buried the hatchet amid my profuse apologies—I knew I need not speak of the last-act episode—and I deplored the want of frankness among women. “Now, look at Bruce and Mr. Benny,” I commented. “Bruce and he had it out just *bla-a*—and that’s the end!” Then I paused forlornly, since the end had been a miserable one. A week before—it was a close, hot night—Bruce Farquhar had told Mr. Benny that “it isn’t square, old man, to swing that pail as you go out. It gets a laugh, and the scene is serious.”

Mr. Benny was on his way to his burrow under the ground, and had not expected this attack, when he was asked to step into the room of the leading man. Once he might have wilted, but this trip to London had given him a sense of sureness in his little self that sometimes

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frightened him, although this he hid. It was as near an approach to "side" as a gentle soul like Mr. Benny ever could assume.

"But it's the business of the play to carry off that pail," he argued. Bella and I were listening through our thin partitions. "How am I agoin' to get it off the stage? Shall I hide it in my coat?"

"You're going to pick it up and carry it off as you did at rehearsals, quietly, not like a whirling Dervish."

This whirling Dervish cut Mr. Benny. As a matter of fact, he did describe a half-circle with the pail as he picked it up, and the business of doing so had developed into a recognized laugh, and an ill-timed one. However, I am sure the little old fellow was unconscious of hurting the line that followed on his exit. But, as I said, it was a sticky night, and Mr. Benny's rheumatism was bad, and Bruce had been up the night before with his wife, who had an ulcerated tooth. So Mr. Benny shouted back at Mr. Farquhar, knowing a thing or two about a whirling Dervish: "And you can't tag me with that, Farquhar. We used to have 'em in the circus, but they had the centre of the ring to whirl in, where the leading men all stand;

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the corners ain't for them." Farquhar gave a growl of anger; but a king had laughed at Mr. Benny, and on he went: "And I want to say right here, I allus tumbled fair, when I was a acrobat, and I've allus tried to act that way—"

"Yes, that's the way you act, all right, all right. I'll grant you that."

There was something in the curves of the interrupting voice of the leading man which turned Mr. Benny very quiet. "What way?" he asked.

"Why, act just like an acrobat," replied Mr. Farquhar, cruelly.

Amelia and I gasped on the other side of the thin partition. Mr. Benny moved slowly toward the door; we could hear Bruce Farquhar slapping down his hair with his military brushes. In the hallway the little comedian paused. "You win," he said; "but you can be mighty sure of one thing, I never swung that pail a-purpose." The door closed and Bruce went on with his change, as Bella and I did with ours, and when we met outside nothing was said upon the subject. We were very friendly with Farquhar and with Mr. Benny. These were the things we did not meddle with, for the stage is the greatest school of discipline in the world.

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This happened a week before the night I squared things with Bella, and it had made us all uncomfortable, for we missed Mr. Benny's running into Bruce Farquhar's room and telling him where he had found good American tobacco, or calling to us, as he passed, that he had stood near enough to the Spanish King to have pinched him, and various other bits of court information. Mrs. Farquhar had been nicer than ever to the little fellow, for one of the points on which theatrical couples pride themselves is the refusing of one to take up cudgels in defence of the other. It is generally declared by American managers that they do not do this, therefore a married pair is considered undesirable in a company, for if he quarrels with the management, she will also, and that will mean two vacancies instead of one. Personally, I have found them rather independent of each other—at least he is of her and she of him—with tears.

However, the new kind of rheumatism medicine that Bruce Farquhar's wife had offered Mr. Benny hadn't done him any good, and on the night I was leaving Bella's room, thinking very well of myself because I had grovelled, and liking almost every one except Hester, I

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heard a commotion on the stairs leading from the underground rooms, and laboring up the steps came big Bruce Farquhar with Mr. Benny in his arms. A doctor followed, and a scared dresser, and of course myself immediately.

"I'll take him into my room," said Bruce; "the air is better." Mr. Benny's white lips moved as though in protest. "Oh, hush up!" replied our leading man. "You'll stay right on here with me until you are over this."

"What is it?" I whispered to the doctor.

"The rheumatism has crept up around his heart. Oh, no danger, I hope," he hastened, at my look. "Let him lie quietly a while, and then we'll take him home."

Mr. Benny caught a fragment of this speech and made an effort to lift himself into a sitting posture. In short gasps he protested. "I'm agoin' on that stage—I ain't a baby—I'll get through all right." Bruce and I exclaimed in one breath, and the doctor made awful threats of giving up the case.

"It's unheard of," he asserted.

"No, it's not," I contradicted. "At home we play when we're almost dying. It's a sort of silly pride with us, not the brutality of the

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management at all. Besides, our understudies are seldom half prepared."

Mr. Benny swung himself off the couch. "Where's my grease - paint?" he demanded. The doctor watched him wonderingly; his patient had been almost in a state of coma a quarter of an hour before, but Bruce and I understood. We knew that if Mr. Benny kept his senses he would play his part. Fortunately he didn't. Just as his dresser, who had wisely run for the stage-manager, reappeared our little fellow reeled and pitched into Bruce's arms once more.

"Don't give him anything to bring him round," I advised the doctor. "If you do, he'll get up and play."

"Hot applications," said the man of medicine.

"Go and notify the understudy," said the stage-manager.

The manager was not at all concerned over a new man going in at "Overture and beginners, please." In England when actors *feel* ill, not *are* ill, they "lay off," and the understudies are rehearsed every week with clock-like regularity. They are generally composed of the supers, or those who do small parts,

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and, though they have never rehearsed with the members of the company, they know every line and every bit of business.

All through the evening we worked over Mr. Benny. Various alcohol lamps used for afternoon tea and hidden from the fireman were suddenly brought forth. Amelia and the other dressers kept the hot cloths going, and we tenderer ones blistered our hands wringing them out. The doctor had difficulty in keeping Bruce's room clear; overflow meetings were held in my apartment, and the call-boy had a busy time getting us up-stairs for our cues.

It was a relief to me to be able to cry as much as I pleased over Mr. Benny, as he had no one to resent it. Once a young comedian whom I played opposite had a sudden attack of poisoning in the theatre, and his sufferings were so dreadful to behold that, while I had never cared much for the young man—he cut in on my laughs—I wept passionately in the hallway until his wife turned on me with a look of keen suspicion. “He is *my* husband,” she remarked, chillingly, and that taught me to guard my emotions when there were wives around. By the end of the second act the pain had been driven from the dangerous region of the heart,

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and the sufferer was able to reply to oft-repeated inquiries of "How are you, old man?" as friendly heads were stuck in at the door. He and Bruce were thick as thieves without a word of explanation on either side.

"I've told my dresser to move all your things up here," our leading man was heard to say through the thin partition, "and when you're on your feet again you'll stay right on with me. It's hell for rheumatism down there." The little comedian was heard to murmur feeble expostulations and words of thanks, but I didn't stop to listen. I was smiling dizzily through more snuffles; it was so like a member of my dear fraternity to claim a room alone for the sake of his position and then share it with one of the least of them.

We were all very happy and close together that night, using great diplomacy, "firstly," in assuring Mr. Benny that his understudy got through all right—which he was glad to hear—yet delicately insinuating that the new man couldn't come up to the original, which he was also glad to hear. And, "secondly," nodding in a congratulatory way to the sweating English understudy and saying, "Splendid!" or "Perfectly easy, aren't you?" or "Don't seem at all

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nervous!" All of which did us no harm and him a great deal of good.

As a matter of fact, we saw very little of his work. It is a breach of stage etiquette to stand in the first entrance and watch a terror-stricken understudy; only the prompter is there with the book, and while we are on the scene we are so busy trying not to forget our own lines, when we hear the cues coming to us in a strange voice, that we do not particularly notice his performance.

We hear sometimes of an understudy who gives a far better interpretation of the rôle than the actor whose part he has hurriedly taken, but it must be a very bad player whom he has replaced. It may not be altogether the understudy's fault; at the end of a week his performance may easily be better than the original one, but for the first few nights his voice is not in accord with those who have been playing together, and the audience feels this lack of undefined harmony. Laughs are lost both by the old players and the new one. It all goes to prove once more that the playing of a part consists not only of the reading of lines but of the actor's alliance with his co-workers; and if we would only bear in mind how greatly de-

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pendent we are upon one another we would not take so deep a pride in a "personal" success.

But this is wandering far from Mr. Benny. We had ructions with our invalid before the evening was over. He *would* go to his lodgings. He was of the kind that still dreads hospitals; besides, it transpired that he had a cat. Bruce must go home with his wife; the Englishmen were willing, but I saw fear in the patient's eyes, and knew he longed to be among his own, so Larry was to spend the night with him—solemnly promising not to go to sleep—Bruce would come the next morning, and I in the afternoon. Bella and Frederica were both eager, but we pushed them away as extraneous matter.

The composer did not meet me that night; it was raining and the water had a sort of Damascan effect upon him—it certainly could not be English. So I jogged home in the fly, and was awakened much earlier than I would have liked the next morning by the head of a large dahlia hitting me in the face. It had come through my open window, and the thrower was shamelessly crying out in the lane: "The red rose whispers, she is late!" Mrs. Erskine, who had come into my room to prepare me for

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what was in the lane, went to the window and said, "It is not a rose, it is a dahlia, and you hit her," then threw it back at him.

Mrs. Erskine was a continual question-mark those days. It was "How can you?" every time she looked at me. But then one of the large dogs had brought to her a heart-shaped frame with a certain photograph in it, which he had dug up at the farthest end of the garden. Goodness knows how he managed it, for I had worked hours burying my sorrow the day after I had received the buying-the-farm letter. Mrs. Erskine behaved very well about the frame, just as though such things happened every day, and of course I had never seen it before.

"What a fine face," she commented, "and what a kind one!"

"Do you think so?" I replied, with studied indifference. "It looks selfish to me, as though it would ask a great deal and give nothing."

"I should think," said she, "that one could easily give up a great deal for such a man. Moreover, that what a woman might once call a 'great deal' would cease to be great and be very small in contrast to what she would receive. It's hard to assure a young girl that

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there is nothing so wonderful in life as a man's love. She must find it out for herself."

I looked at Mrs. Erskine rebelliously.

"There is nothing greater than my work!" I cried.

"There is no comparison; they are not the same species," she responded, quietly.

Then I left her in a rush, for it was Aaron's voice I heard. Aaron and Frederica and Mrs. Erskine, all so different, yet all harking on the same thought. I didn't see the heart-shaped frame again, and of course I didn't refer to it.

But to go back to the hitting-in-the-face-by-the-dahlia morning, I was soon out and going toward the river with Meurice, for I had promised him the whole day, and since it had to be curtailed in order to sit with Mr. Benny, I wanted to give him what time I could.

Then, too, I was eager to tell him about the excitement, for Meurice was always interested in my affairs in the theatre, becoming very wild when he feared I wasn't well treated, and advising me to refuse to play or to demand an apology or never speak to them again—all of which was impossible, and made me sigh for a little well-tempered judgment.

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To my surprise, he didn't want to hear of Mr. Benny's sufferings. "Don't, don't!" he exclaimed, almost walking out of the punt into the water. "Pain is imperfection; let us put it out of our lives as much as we can. See the swans coming to greet their princess!"

"No, they want some biscuit," I answered. "Don't be selfish, Meurice; why should we try to forget Mr. Benny's sufferings? He is my faithful little friend, and you say we shall share all of each other's emotions when we are—well, you know—bound!"

"Bound! I hate the word. Say, rather, woven into one."

"All right, when we are woven. Are you going to run away when I am ill? I have headaches, you know—sick ones."

The composer waved the dripping punt pole over me. "Desert you, little brown thing! Would a bird desert his mate? I shall be near, dear, always near, playing sweet harmonies to lull the pain."

I was resentful. "Yes, I know that kind of bird. He sits out in the sun on the best branch and sings his head off, and the poor lady-bird is stuck down in a hole in the tree, and every time another bird looks as though he would

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like to call on her, Mr. Husband-bird pecks him off and then goes back to his trilling."

Meurice thought it was idyllic. "Although," he continued, "I shall be nearer to you than that—I have decided to keep a small piano, at least, in our sleeping-room; sometimes a harmony comes quickly to me that I must play out, not note down dully on black bars."

I looked in alarm at my composer, thinking of a certain time when he hunted for stray leaves all through the night until the cook gave warning. I tried to remember just how I became engaged to this young man. And it afforded me some satisfaction that I had never definitely given a promise. We had just drifted into present conditions, were scarcely an engaged couple at all, for I had not a ring and he had never kissed me. Once he had tried, and called me "will-o'-the-wisp" because I managed to slip from his arms, and afterward he composed a something or other lengthily called "Maiden Immaculate, from Your Tower of Virtue, Speak." It made me sorry and ashamed when I saw the title and heard the gentle music. "For the fire is not yet kindled," he had explained; yet way down in my heart I knew right well that it had been—but not for him.

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What made me most suspicious of the real eligibility of the composer was the complacent attitude of his family toward his marrying an American. (Of course, had I been a rich American, it would have been very simple.) And now this-small-piano-in-his-sleeping-apartment idea, coupled with the recollections of the good departing cook, occasioned me to speculate on the advantage of having a composer in the family but not in the house. I knew Frederica was guiltless, for she was mad with joy over the thought of having me kin to her, although several times removed; but the deadly way that Mrs. Wallace—remotely of the Collection—had of boasting of her nephew's fame, then flying to the garden whenever he began working on a theme, filled me with future dread.

In the midst of these reflections Meurice ran his punt into another boat, which was his universal habit, and a squeal came from under a green parasol, which was Mrs. Wallace's, and a shout of expostulation from a gruff old gentleman sitting by her side, which turned out, after apologies and introductions, to belong to Sir William Kenton.

Although it is not as fine to have a "sir" with you as it is to have a "lord," I could see that

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Mrs. Wallace was pleased, and so was I, although I should have liked him just as much had his name been only Bill. Not that I don't like titles—they are very decorative—but that Sir William would have appealed to me unadorned. He was shrewd and crusty, and brave about the mouth, keeping it in a firm line when it would like to have been a little tremulous. Mrs. Wallace told me, when we all went ashore at one of the river inns to have some ginger-beer, that he had a great sorrow in his life which he hid, also that he was to stay two days with them, so she hoped Meurice wouldn't compose at night, and couldn't I influence him.

It was not my influential day with Meurice. I had already vaguely alluded to the necessity of going to town early in the afternoon, and I saw he was going to be tantrumish about it. Perhaps it was to avoid the full force of his petulant objections that I again referred to my leaving while we were all four sitting about an iron table on the inn lawn. This was cowardly in me, but I didn't see any reason why Mrs. Wallace, being a blood relation, shouldn't share some of his disposition when crossed, and I intuitively felt that Sir William would be on my side.

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Once or twice previous to that day I had stepped aside, figuratively speaking, to wonder at the seeming interchange of natures which was permitting the composer all the vagaries while I walked the earth soberly, attaching myself to his balloon-like fantasies like a drag-anchor. I found it was more tiring than the coping with a sterner character, and as I looked forward to a lifetime of it I thought how grateful should Mr. St. John Melford—and Aaron—be for escaping from me so successfully.

The Wallace Collection—meaning the aunt and nephew—entertained different objections to my going to Mr. Benny. Meurice said the sky was like a speckled trout, and a tryst was a tryst. Mrs. Wallace thought that it wasn't at all nice for a young girl to enter the sleeping-room of a man, no matter how ill. The composer's reason I waived impatiently aside; his aunt's filled me with that impotent rage which the Philistine engenders. Instinctively I turned to Sir William, as did Mrs. Wallace. The old man had unleashed the stern line of his mouth.

"Once upon a time," he said, gently, "I would have thought you were solely right, Mrs. Wallace. Now I know that there are other people who, as they look from out their soul

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windows, do not see the same sights, and yet their vision is clear, too. I have been a long time finding this to be so, and I have not yet generally admitted it."

I found the moment following to be more impressive than my simple case seemed to warrant. Mrs. Wallace looked at him strangely, and, while I had won, I felt that some one else had conquered a still greater cause. I rose to go, clasping the hand of Sir William and declining his escort to the station. Meurice had refused to accompany me, and Mrs. Wallace shrugged off his conduct lightly as a lover's quarrel, but to me it was a shadow of the future blocking out the day's sun.

I sat with Mr. Benny all that afternoon and I sat with him that night. Mrs. Farquhar's tooth was worse, the Englishmen's wives were awaiting them in the country, Larry was tired out, and I was glad not to go down to Walton for a little space. A nurse had been procured, but while Mr. Benny was ill he was very conscious, and I saw in his eyes that he wanted his own "folks" near by.

"It's a perfect shame," said the stage-manager to me, "with a *matinée* to-morrow; but do what you think best." There wasn't the

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smallest talk of the propriety of the matter or the least thought of it. If Mr. Benny was ill, why shouldn't I sit through the night with him?

I had snatches of sleep on a hard little sofa with obtrusive arms; but when the spasms of pain were bad I helped with hot cloths, and afterward sat by the bed and talked to him of our "kid" days, as Mr. Benny put it, for we had both come from little Western towns, only his town had grown into a city before I was assuming citizenship. "Remember band nights?" panted Mr. Benny.

"Remember!" I responded, laughing softly. "Will I ever forget them? Always in a hurry to do up the dishes; and some awful nights when there was company, strains of the first number filtered up the street clear from the court-house square before we were half through. Oh, the agony of that!"

"Same with me," chuckled Mr. Benny, painfully, "only it was the cow to milk. I lived with my uncle to get a little schooling before my mother taught me tumbling. Gee! them was good days, only I didn't know it."

There was a silence broken by a giggle from me.

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"What yer thinkin' of?" demanded the invalid.

"Perhaps I shouldn't talk," I returned, turning to the nurse, who was looking out at the early dawn.

"Go on, Miss Miller," she replied, "this heart medicine stops the pain, but stimulates him; he won't sleep for a little."

"I was thinking of my first beau, Dave Connor," I went on. "He was very grand, as his father was sheriff, and he drove around in a buggy on band nights, while I stood at Colter's drug store with the girls. It was two years before he had the courage to ask me to drive with him, and that night their old family horse scared at 'Poet and Peasant,' and ran clear home to the barn with the whole town after us. The poet and peasant were completely deserted, whereas Dave and I were found still sitting in the buggy frightened to death, while the horse was eating hay from off the barn floor. We were about twelve years each—including the horse."

"Girls never took much to me," confessed Mr. Benny. "I was always undersized, and of course I only liked the big ones, who didn't know I was on earth. Used to want to be

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loved, too; had a sort of hollow feeling all the time that no amount of my aunt's pie could fill. They was generous with the pie, my folks was, but they wasn't the kind to lavish kisses round, and I tell you a child needs it."

The nurse gave her charge a spoonful of medicine while I chewed the cud of rather bitter reflections.

"I think you're right," I finally answered. "I lived with distant relatives, and they were unvarying in their kindness, but demonstrative affection was looked upon as a sort of evil passion. I didn't go out of my own home to get it, as some girls did, but I put it in my work on the stage. I felt for years that I could do without the love of a human being; it didn't seem to me necessary, since love and—and kisses had always been withheld from me, so I just put it in my work, and—" I paused as though the subject was too big for words.

"'Tain't right," said Mr. Benny, simply, with a drowsy note in his voice which we were glad to hear. "But it ain't too late for you; you're a girl yet; get it somehow or other. I loved a woman once; she wasn't a good woman, but I ain't ever been sorry that I loved her."

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He told me a little more of her, and after awhile he dozed off and the nurse was much gratified. "He'll sleep into the day now," she said to me.

I found myself suddenly very tired, and the woman eyed me kindly. "Go down into the room they have reserved for me," she said. "I'll wake you in good time."

So for the next three hours I slept uneasily, still clad, and long before the matinée was in to bid good-bye to Mr. Benny, who was surely on the mend and very cheery. "I sha'n't forget this," he commented, as I was leaving.

"Oh, hush up!" I answered, which seems to be the usual theatrical reply to stop all bursts of gratitude.

At midnight I stepped heavily from the railway carriage; my head was swimming from exhaustion, my back aching, the wires in my brain were twisted in a knot. Beyond the official at the gate I descried the figure of Meurice, and with a thrill of tenderness I walked weakly toward him—his strength would rest me. "You received my wire, Meurice?"

"Yes. What madness! If my aunt had not been quieted by Sir William, I am sure she would have come to town and said a few things

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to you, but that queer old duffer claimed you were quite right."

"Well, don't you scold, Meurice; I am not up to anything to-night; I am beaten out. Where is the fly?"

"Scold! Darling bird, I never felt so unlike it in my life. As for the fly, we'll do without it, dear. The night is perfect, so I sent it back."

I stopped and stared at him. "But, Meurice, I am deadly tired. How can I walk two miles to-night? Why don't you think of me?"

"Of you? I think of nothing else! Of you close by me, in the soft black night, the sweet smell of the pines, and—"

I broke in upon his rhapsody. "Come on, then; but I must lean on you."

"Lean on me, dear, lean your soul upon my soul."

"Meurice, it's not my soul alone that's weary, it's my legs."

"Rhoda!" breathed my fiancé.

Defiantly I set my teeth while we went on in silence. Occasionally he would stop to half hum a bar of music. "It's torturing me; I can't get the harmony; I'm nearly mad."

"I'm sorry. Have you tried it on your piano?"

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"I tried it all last night."

"Oh, Meurice! And poor Sir William—how did he—?"

"Behaved outrageously, my dear! He sleeps to-night at the inn. He is not spiritual, Rhoda."

"Even the thing you care for becomes an agony sometimes, and Sir William may not care for music. Why, to-night I thought I never should drag through my scenes. It seems—it seems unfair, sometimes, that women, who are weaker than men, should have to work so hard; don't you think so, Meurice?"

I had never advanced this theory before to any one; I had never thought of it. But I was hungry for the protecting quality of a man—for something stronger than myself to rest me.

Meurice became reproachful. "Nestling! Your art, can you speak ill of it?"

"No, I won't. But can't *you*, don't *you*, hate it? It has exhausted *me*!"

"Ah, art is a cruel mistress"—airily this—"but how fortunate we both are to possess gifts from the gods!"

I was caring very little for the gods and the gifts they bestowed, and I pursued my subject. "But shall I not give it up, Meurice, when we

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are married?" Even as I asked this question I was astounded at myself.

"No, Rhoda, no; what would the gods say?"

I stumbled over a stone and drew in my breath sharply. "I don't care a fig about all Olympus in a bunch. What will my *husband* say, that's what I want to know, to his wife earning her own living?"

"Money—pooh! What is that? Throw it to the swine!"

"I probably shall!" — which the composer didn't get. "But leaving you at night, toasty and warm by the fire, while I go to my work; how will that look, Meurice?" I waited anxiously for his reply. It was as though my future hung upon it.

"I shall be awaiting you at midnight. We will talk of the play, and I shall do my latest music for you."

I could not answer. There was a pounding in my head and in my heart; there was a surging within me like a protest of angry seas, like the upheaval of an earthquake. It was all so queer. I was arguing from the wrong standpoint. Meurice was in my place and I was in—whose? I don't know how long this went on. I know as we came to Rosemary Lane and I saw

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from away off Mrs. Erskine's beacon-light in the hall—the "anxious light" she called it—I know that without warning, without the mightiness of deep feeling, my composer tilted up my chin and caught my lips between his own. I know I brought my hands against his breast with a force born of rage and pushed him back. He made an exclamation, but I stopped him in a rush of words.

"Don't, don't! I hate you! It's my fault, not yours. I love some one else. I have for months, but I didn't know it. I never can kiss any one in the world but that one man, and what's the use in going on? It's just been a pretend, but I tried to believe in it; I did really. He doesn't care for me; let that be your comfort. I'll be alone for the rest of my life; but I'd rather be than go through the awfulness of the pressure of a man's lips against my own when I don't love him. I'm sorry, oh, I'm sorry, but what's the use of trying, for I love him, I love him, I—"

That carried me, running, to the door, which was held open by anxious Mrs. Erskine, and I sank to the floor as it banged shut. I didn't faint; I'm not that kind. Mrs. Erskine extinguished the light and we were motionless in

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the dark. We heard the composer knock once upon the door, then turn to go, and we caught his ejaculation.

"Well, I'll be damned!" were his words.

"That's the best thing he ever said," asserted Mrs. Erskine. "Come to bed."

She undressed me and said nothing, brought me a sleeping-draught, and kissed me good-night.

I lay for a long time quietly, at peace with the elements which had been so long warring within me. I knew myself at last. I acknowledge my defeat, and it was sweet.

XI

A SLEEP without a twitch of the limbs or the slow turning of the body; a creeping of the sunlight up the Venetian blinds until it reached my face; an imperious voice through the window—a woman's voice, associated dimly with old masters; oh yes—but drowsily—Mrs. Wallace. "She's sleeping, ma'am"—this in an accent that bespoke a maid. A drawing up of the sheet over my face to keep out the sun, more heavy sleep. A commotion on the stairs, some one coming up and some one stopping her. The firm voice of Mrs. Erskine above the maid's, "She cannot be aroused," then an exclamation from some one coming up, and after that so deep a quiet that its impressiveness awoke me.

"So it's you, Jane Kenton"—this from the Collection after the pause became an abyss of silence.

"Yes, it is I," from Mrs. Erskine.

"Does your father know?"

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"Know what?"

"That you are back in England."

"I think not. I hold no communication with my father."

"Well, upon my word, and keeping lodgers!"

"Lodger!"

"Rhoda told me she was living with a Mrs. Erskine. Am I to be deceived by every one?"

"There is no deception; she doesn't know. I have a right to have a lodger, and to say I'm Mrs. Erskine. It was my mother's name."

"You have a right to do anything you wish except to keep a young girl who will soon be of my family in ignorance of what you are."

"Mrs. Wallace!"

"My dear Janet, I know and love Sir William; his friends cannot forgive your treatment of him."

"And—and my father! How does he feel?"

There was an eager note in the voice of Mrs. Erskine. I sat up in bed straining my ears shamelessly.

"As we feel; how else should he?"

"A—ah!" It was an exhalation of pain.

Mrs. Wallace harked back remorselessly: "And all this time you have been imposing upon Miss Miller, who will be one of us."

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"Yes." The voice of my landlady faltered. "But she was so charming, and loved the dogs, and I was glad to have the money."

There was a heavy movement on the stairs as though an army were advancing. "I must speak with her."

"You'll tell her?"

"I must do my duty."

"I would rather be the one myself."

"You are a little late. Besides, there are other matters." I shivered. "She has boxes in the storehouse?"

There was a pause, then a crossing on the stairs. "I will send them up, but it is cruel to wake her. She is much exhausted."

"So am I," with bitter majesty. "Which door?" More rustling.

At my answer Mrs. Wallace stepped into my room, pulled up the blind, and covered a large chair by the bed. She opened her mouth to speak; tremulously eager—after all, it had its piquant note, this discovery. But I forestalled her.

"I heard you on the stairs," I prefaced. "There is something — well, what you call 'wrong' with my Mrs. Erskine. I'd rather she would tell me."

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But Mrs. Wallace was not one to be robbed of an opportunity. In fear of losing the situation by further revelations she rushed on incoherently:

"Eloped, my dear, and a poor weakling, too—to France they went, of course—that was bad enough, but afterward to find him married—yes, married—had been for five years—some ne'er-do-weel, no doubt. It quite broke his heart—her father's heart. Sir William Kenton is her father. Think of them being within a stone's-throw of each other, but he must never know. Thank Heaven, he goes away to-day! And then the worst—she wouldn't leave him—your Mrs. Kenton—no, lived on with him, after she learned the truth—a married man—in France, of course. She held her head high through it all, never pleaded for forgiveness of Sir William after the man died, never wrote to him, never touched the allowance he so magnificently made her. And now we find her here, raising fine dogs—perfectly shameless." Mrs. Wallace gasped.

"Well, and what else?" I sandwiched.

"What else! Rhoda, have you gone mad, too? You must have. What did you do to my poor nephew? All night on the piano, 'dis-

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cords from the heart'; but we can have more of this afterward; now you must pack your things."

"What for?"

"You must leave at once. Help me, my child. I am here for Meurice—for Meurice I take you from this house. I had expected to act only as peacemaker, now I find I have a more Spartan duty."

"But I'm not going."

"Not going? I have told you—where you are."

I rose and pulled a dressing-gown about me. "Dear me, those thin things, just lace and ribbon, quite indecent!" murmured Mrs. Wallace. That human element in my guest brought her nearer to me, yet I felt the necessity of fighting on my feet.

"Dear Mrs. Wallace," I began, "I know you want to shelter me because I may be of your family—"

"Precisely," said Mrs. Wallace.

"But, believe me, I shall never be. I can't go into all that now, but I don't love Meurice, and you mustn't urge a reconciliation. It's over. He'll soon stop playing discords and go back to pastorals again. I know enough of the artistic temperament to grasp that quite."

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Mrs. Wallace sneered. "Judging by yourself, you mean?"

I laughed wisely. "Oh no. I fear I'm not an artist, I'm just a woman. But that doesn't matter now. Go home, please; you've been most kind, but I'm as happy here as I ever shall be anywhere."

"But, my dear, as a member of the Society for Young Girls Seeking Situations in the City I can't let you stop on in this place."

I looked at Mrs. Wallace in rebuke. "The biggest thing about you English is the minding of your own affairs; it is where the universal theatre and the British race join hands. Now, this is no concern of mine. I love Mrs. Erskine, and she is a good landlady, therefore I stay on."

Mrs. Wallace was a little mollified by this high praise of her own country, yet she was honest. "We mind our own affairs, my child, when the truth is not thrust upon us; when it is, we must cling to the dictates of society."

"Then that is where the universal theatre and the British race diverge," I mused. "We believe in morality, we teach it to our children, but at no time do we follow the dictates of society so long as we are comfortable."

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There was a finality about this speech, denuded of all sentiment, which brought Mrs. Wallace out of her chair. A look was in her face as of one who had done her duty, and mixed with it a certain new-born thankfulness which would suggest that, after all, there could be worse things in her family than a piano going through the night. She lost none of her dignity in her retreat; she would have termed it a withdrawal.

"I fear this must be good-bye, Miss Miller."

I nodded in assent, and then, a little eagerly, for I didn't want her to misunderstand me or my people: "She is alone now, Mrs. Wallace, and she must have suffered terribly. She needs me. Oh, I am sure Christ would do the same if He were staying in the house."

Mrs. Wallace held up her lorgnon and gazed at me coldly. "You take more upon yourself than I would assume, were my soul's safety still uncertain, when you bring into this sordid atmosphere so remote a being as our Lord."

"Why, no, He's sure to be here now we need Him!" I cried out in rebellion; but she had gone.

I remember afterward I didn't take my tub; there was a feverish laving of my face; and as I was finishing my hair a big trunk was bumped

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against my door. I opened it suddenly on Mrs. Erskine and the maid; the latter vanished down the stairs. She had a "feeling" for the worst, she told me afterward. "Moving, Mrs. Erskine?" I said, forcing what cheer I could muster into my shaking voice.

"My name is Waite—Mrs. Waite," was her low response. "I want to tell you all about it."

"Come in and tell me, if you want to; but if you don't—"

My landlady shut the door and leaned against it, speaking without a pause: "I did run away and marry him. My father was opposed to him, and I was wild and headstrong. We went to France and had two almost perfect years. I wrote often to my father for forgiveness; it was terrible knowing him in England, and unhappy, while there was so much joy in my life—that was my only grief; but he never would relent. Then my — my husband — I thought he was, you know—went into quick consumption. We moved South that the end might be easier and as beautiful as that death can ever be. Three months before he died my father came to me. He had proof, positive proof, that Charles had a wife in an asylum for the insane in England, so he had made the

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journey to take me home. I wouldn't go; the man was dying; and then father cursed me and went back alone. Charles never knew that he had been to see me; I told him nothing. It was for him to speak; and finally he did, the weakness of his nature resolving itself into strength as he approached the Infinite. I stayed on as nurse, but almost immediately upon his confession came the news from the authorities that she had gone before him. We were married on the day he died. I did that because he wished it; I didn't care. Father had left me, and nothing mattered. That is all."

My friend still leaned against the door, impassive. I sopped the tears from off my face and cleared my throat. "Then you wrote Sir William?"

She shook her head. "No, he is a man all principle. I couldn't rectify my error by the murmurings of a priest. But I grew homesick, homesick for him and England, so I came here to be a little near, and yet far enough away never to pain him. We live in the North. I suppose my secret's ceased to be one now. Sarah Wallace certainly will write to him."

She stopped speaking, and waited quietly. Thoughts, varied and fragmentary, raced

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through my brain. My friend was wrong; Mrs. Wallace would not tell him, and yet why not? Why not some one tell him—and soon—before he left the inn? He had befriended Mr. Benny and me, and the lines of his mouth that he kept bravely in a firm line had relaxed into those of a tender old man who had grown to see things differently, or, as he had put it: "Now I know that there are other people who, as they look from out their soul windows, do not see the same sights, and yet their vision is clear, too. I have been a long time finding this to be so, and I have not yet generally admitted it."

"He had not yet generally admitted it," I repeated.

"What?" queried my friend.

Then I realized that she had been looking at me rather longingly, so I rushed into her arms, but only for a moment. "I was afraid," she said; "yet somehow I knew you would stand by me." At this her voice grew misty and mine severe. I assumed the generalship for once.

"Get out my pink dress"—fastening my shoes—"I'm going for a walk."

"Rhoda! Where?"

I was irritable. "Oh, just a walk. Can't a girl go for a walk?"

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"Not to Meurice, my dear?"

I laughed. It sounded strange, but I was glad to laugh again. "Button me up."

"Shall I go, too, child?"

"Heavens, no!" I shrieked. "I want to be alone."

"Oh, beg pardon, dear." My landlady was wonderfully meek. "Well, the world wags on like my poor doggies' tails. The beasties, not half of them are combed!"

"I'll take one with me," mapping out a quick campaign. "I think that I can sell it." I grabbed up Frederica, who had come snooping in.

"Then don't take her; she *is* sold."

"All the better; I just want a bait—I mean a sample."

I was flying down the steps, Mrs. Erskine quick after me. "I don't like seeing you go off alone in this excited state. You haven't had your breakfast—"

"Then go back and see that I get a good one," I snapped from out the lane. "I'm not staying here for charity."

"Rhoda Miller!" came faintly to my ears.

The Magpie was some distance off, and once more mindful of the time I did not take a han-

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som and Amelia dropped the letter in, I hailed a butcher's cart, when quite out of view of staring windows, offering a half-crown—a time note—to put me down somewhere near the inn. The butcher's boy did his work thoroughly. In spite of all expostulation, the hams, the joints, and I were halted only before the Magpie door, and there stood Sir William telling the landlady he had had a good night's rest and a good late breakfast, and that he now would walk across—

“Do you want to buy a dog?” It came from the butcher's cart, and was not led up to by certain expressions that I had decided on. But things shaped themselves just so. I was a humble instrument and nothing more that day.

“Bless my soul!” replied Sir William. “What is it—sausage-meat?”

“No, sir,” I said, descending, while the landlady glared: oh, these mad Americans! “But I heard that you were at the inn, and I thought I'd try to see you before you left. Mrs. Wallace”—a cough here—“doesn't care for dogs. It's a nice girl one.”

Sir William lifted the puppy by the neck, and she licked his face; a baronet was nothing to Frederica. “She is rather a nice little thing,”

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commented the pleased nobleman. We had started to walk along toward Mrs. Wallace's, which lay beyond Rosemary Lane. "But I don't know what the stablemen would say if I brought home a puppy."

"There are grown-up ones also where I live," I pursued. "They're for sale, too. Won't you turn off and see them?"

"Oh, I wouldn't have an old one; they care only for the master they have left behind. To tell the truth, we haven't had a dog about since—" Sir William hesitated and grew a little tremulous about the mouth. "Well, I had a daughter once who was very fond of dogs. I kept hers till they died, and then I lived on with my memories."

I was touched, but relentless. "It's a lady who breeds them at my house—a real lady—she is quite poor, and it would be a great act of kindness if you would buy one. Do come and see them."

"Oh, I dare say, when it comes to charity, I might. I suppose this little one will do. How much?"

I gazed at the puppy closely, affecting great astonishment. "Why, this one's Frederica! She is sold—how stupid I should have brought her

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to you!—but there are others.” I seized Sir William’s arm, endeavoring to steer him toward the way that led to Puppy Villa. But he was mindful of his hostess and the lateness of the hour, showing an inclination to choose the other path which led on to the river houses.

“Sold, eh? Ah, well, I’ll take that as an omen. I’m too old a man to train a puppy. Won’t you go on to Mrs. Wallace’s, Miss Rhoda?”

I was desperate; I dropped my eyes. “I never can go there again, Sir William.”

“What’s that you say?”

“It’s off.”

“You don’t mean—” And Sir William walked with me toward Rosemary Lane, his keen eyes twinkling and his lips relaxing into smiles. I did not tell him “all,” and I painted myself in the blackest colors, but he waived the defaming of my faithlessness aside. “Better for you, my dear young lady. That piano, you know, all the night—shockin’, shockin’. I’ll take Meurice off to my place, so you can go out on the river and not be run down by his punt. He can live in the lodge with ten pianos; not a soul to hear him—old Peter’s deaf.”

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We were in Rosemary Lane, approaching the little gate which led directly to the kennel yard. My heart was beating so hard I was surprised Sir William didn't hear it. Almost there, and yet, just ten feet away from the gate, he brought himself up with a start. "Bless my soul, I *am* getting to be an old gossip! I've walked along without taking notice, and my poor friend is waiting for me."

I dragged him five feet nearer, while the other five feet I walked alone. I swung open the gate, and with puckered lips framed my plea, for my anxious mind could devise no further light deception.

"Go in," I breathed.

I don't know what the old man saw in my tense face, but his own resolved into wondering lines, and yet, unquestioning, he passed into the yard. She was kneeling on the earth, puppies tugging at her apron, and one squirming little fellow held to the ground while she vigorously brushed his coat. There was a glisten of tears on her face, but her mouth was bravely kept in a firm line, just as had been Sir William's on the day that I first met him. If that father had halted an instant in his walk I believe he would have turned away again, but



"JANIE!" HE CRIED

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THE ACTRESS

on he went like a machine, and when he was quite close to her she looked up, rose to her feet, and walked to meet him. There wasn't a sound until within reaching distance, when they both held out their arms, each one dropping a puppy, yet never knowing it.

"Janie!" he cried.

"Father!" she sobbed out.

I went away and had my breakfast, which was luncheon, in the pantry, that they might not find me for a long time. "Susan," I told the maid, who was describing her feelings while I ate my eggs, "if you ever have any trouble just walk up to it, and then it won't be a trouble any more. Don't stop walking till you reach it."

"Yes, miss," said Susan, "hit's like the 'ills and mountings—not so steep when you get to 'em."

I was amazed at Susan's excellent philosophy, and we fraternized in the pantry, which of course I never should have done. I was obliged to limit my information, but I flashed the title to her great delight, and I inferred that everything had turned out splendidly. This was no surprise to Susan, for she replied that she 'ad 'ad a feelin' that it would, and she was a kind mistress wotsomever.

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All this fell on a Thursday, and on the following Monday I came up to town and put my photographs on the mantel-piece of a room in my club, so that became my home. Sir William had stayed on at Puppy Villa, for he couldn't stand his daughter out of his sight. His things had been sent over from Mrs. Wallace's place, together with a large bunch of forget-me-nots from Mrs. Wallace to Mrs. Erskine-Waite—that's our compromise on names—and a note stating that she and her nephew were going to the Continent, which was a great relief to all of us.

My dear landlady couldn't manage to get the dogs crated before Monday. It was so like her to refuse to go to the home she had not seen for quite ten years until the dogs went, too. Even I was asked. I was not to be crated, I was to be adopted—with papers, if you please, most legal. I had to invite Bella down on Sunday to hear the offer from Sir William's own lips or she never would have believed it. Of course, I hooted at it—a polite hoot; but I let it be understood that it would be as easy to make me into a tamale as an Englishwoman. Finally Mrs. Erskine-Waite abandoned the idea on condition that I should visit them at least

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once a year. She gave me the dog Aary as a present, and she packed my trunks herself. When I came to unlock them at my club, the first thing greeting me was the heart-shaped frame with Aaron, a little mouldy, but still in it. So I put them back of the heart-shaped pin-cushion that had gone travelling with me, too, because I had stopped deceiving myself about whom I loved.

I admitted in the long hours of the night, before I could grow accustomed to the motor 'buses screaming along Piccadilly, that I had always loved him, and that I had written to him because I loved him, and, strangely enough, I loved him all the more because he was loving Hester and buying her farm for them to live in. Sometimes, after saying this over a number of times, I would drop off to sleep. It was like deep breathing, for it swept my brain of all phantasies about myself, and art, and my relation to it.

My work I still loved, I still venerated. It was my present, it was my future, and I thanked God from my heart that there was a place for me in the theatre and that I was needed there. It did not seem to me that I was needed greatly anywhere else during those first weeks in Sep-

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tember—those peculiarly lifeless days, when all London is like a closed bedroom that has been slept in.

Frederica still loved me, but—and that was all right, too. Larry had grown accustomed to getting on without me, Mr. Benny had been granted a vacation and sent to some German baths, still—I was needed in the theatre. There were four hours out of the twenty-four when I could drop my outside griefs, at least. Once I would have cried, “A man can do no more!” but in September of that year I admitted that a man could do much more were there no hectoring Hesters in the world.

At first the club was a diversion. I had been made a member immediately upon the heels of our successful opening, leaping in wonderfully undisputed as an artist. It was for women, but men were welcome; that is the painful difference between a man’s and a woman’s club. To a casual observer it might very well have been taken for some sort of lenient male club where women were permitted on certain days. There was always a thin, blue haze of cigarette smoke in the “lounge” and a clink of whiskey glasses. It was very hard, when I first came, to call the smoking-room a lounge

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and not just what it was. And each night I would ask, "Is the bar open?"—hotel fashion—to be told gently that "there is a waiter in attendance, madam."

Whatever they called it, I had my stout, and not a word of criticism; indeed, they hardly seemed to know that I was in existence. That wonderful ability to mind their own affairs penetrates even to the heart of a British woman's club. This quite distressed me at the beginning; it seemed unfeminine. I yearned for distinguishing marks of my own kind, and it was not until I heard a few comments from a circle, blowing rings, concerning the executive, that I was assured I would not lose my womanliness by staying on.

But it was lonely. The great dining-room was half lighted and only a tenth filled at that season of the year. Here and there alone sat the women, eating, reading from books as they dined, drinking, and going out. I seemed to see myself in every one of them, sitting alone at hotel tables all through my life, coming in and eating and going out. No great, easy Aaron opposite telling the boy that the lady's chop must be quite underdone—no, rare—and if the cheese was not soft, just bring the coffee.

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I ate so quickly that I often walked down to the theatre to kill the time, and as September fretted itself away in a little rash of heat I loitered outside when I reached the court, although Amelia would be in the Strand staring at the wheels of the motor 'buses as though expecting to see me distributed beneath the Juggernaut. It was not dislike for my work that constrained me to loiter, it was the fear of it—the fear that is engendered by a long run and an unrecognized physical exhaustion, a new trouble which the stage door could not shut out. It was the terror of losing one's lines and, having lost them, of being quite unable to substitute a word; to know that the prompter had long since put away his book and that the actors on the scene could not help. "Since I have tripped over one word, why not all of them?" it was my wont to cry to my empanicked self. "What is there to *make* me know them?" And then: "Steady, hold on to yourself, Rhoda; let the words come, don't think of them." This to my quaking mentality as the perspiration trickled drop by drop off my forehead, and the bride in the box commented audibly upon a funny American who felt the heat.

It is almost impossible to make an "out-

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sider" understand this peculiar form of stage fright which seizes a tired actor after a run is well advanced. But it is quite enough to suffer it; I would not attempt to explain the phenomenon. Our only consolation is that those who declare they have never known the condition, during a first night or later, are generally such poor actors they are not worthy of consideration one way or the other. I believe it cannot be obviated if a player clings to the readings that he decides during rehearsals, or the first week or so, are the right ones for the situation. If he changes his inflections later on, having lost the significance of the sentence through much repetition, he is very apt to read falsely. Following that theory, he is forced into a certain amount of mechanism, and, like all delicate machinery, a slight jar will stop the wheel from going round. It must be understood that he is none the less conscientious in his work. He does not reserve his emotional strength, he expends it as freely as ever upon the character, but he has become entirely the medium through which the character is expressed. The result is quite as exhaustive as in the earlier days, when he threw more of his ego into his rôle and perhaps less of the character.

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One night Bruce stumbled in his lines; he corrected himself and went on, but fear was in his voice. Then he came to a word that he forgot, and he made a sound like it but that was no word at all—"esspassum," I think he said, for experience. This often happens, and if the player keeps on, the audience thinks it has not quite caught what was said. Such mistakes are humorous for the other actors on the scene, except when there is a note of terror in the player's voice. Then they do not laugh, for they, too, are growing panicky. Fear breeds fear, line after line is delivered haltingly, and sometimes the stage-manager gets out the script, standing in the first entrance, that the actors may see him and recover their confidence.

On the night Bruce said "esspassum" we assured him, when the scene was over, that the lapse wasn't noticed, laughing then—with him. "And what do you suppose started it?" he confided. "I've been in the habit of looking up at the brass balcony rail on that line and catching a glint of metal from the ray of some lamp; to-night the light must have been out, for there was no reflection—nothing to catch my eye. It made me falter, and you know the rest." We waggled understanding heads.

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As time dragged on through September, and once each day little chills ran over me, followed by a great prostration of heat, and my head ached, growing so heavy that I was not able to think quickly, I began to notice the stage-manager in the first entrance during my scenes with the prompt-book in his hand. This occurred first at a matinée when a lady clattered her teacup during my scene with Larry. The words quite left me; I was speechless; I felt that not only then, but never, would I be able to frame another sentence. With sick eyes I turned to him for help, and he replied, with his blue ones full of pity as he whispered back: "I can't, old girl."

Somehow we got through, as we always do. I think he cut out my speech, going on with his response to it, which made no sense at all, but mattered little to us—nor to the lady who clattered her teacup. Afterward he told me of a number of things he could have done, and I was just as grateful. But it is curious how long we can play a scene with an actor yet never learn his lines, whereas a child in the company will know the whole play before the season is over.

Perhaps I was most frightened at myself

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when I found that those around me were able, as I continued to blunder, to throw me my lines. I knew then that they must have committed my speeches, in case of an emergency, although they stoutly denied this when charged with it by me. So I could only squeeze their hands gratefully when the scene was over and I would go to the wings, Amelia standing anxiously by, a coat in one hand, in case I was chilly, and a fan in the other, should I be burning up.

The English stage-manager advised a doctor, at which I laughed, and suggested a vacation, which I pronounced ridiculous. "Mr. Benny is away now," I replied, "and it would weaken the cast." He kindly admitted that this was so. I say "kindly," for I would have been heartbroken had I found they did not need me even in the theatre.

"I feel better now about my lines," I said to him one night, as September was nearing its end. I was on the other side of my little curtained wash-place calling to him, for I had had a night of horror—although I was trying not to let him know it—and Amelia was sponging off my sweating body with alcohol. "What alarms me now is, I don't know when to sit down and when to get up. Now, with all of

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them so kind, and you in the first entrance, I know I can get through my words. If I pay strict attention to what the others say I will certainly find some sequence of thought, but what is there to tell me that on this line or on that line I sit down or pour a drink or start a song? Of course I knew once, but with this queer head of mine I forget, and if I begin to speak while I am standing, where I have been sitting heretofore, I feel the difference and that makes me stumble in my lines again."

"Well, if you won't consult a doctor and won't take a holiday—it's pure brain-fag, I've seen it before—come to the theatre in the afternoon now and then, and we'll go over the scenes and try to associate some new idea relative to the business."

I always walked back to the club after these rehearsals, telling myself that the line "thar's rain in the air" was as good a reason for rising from a log as "there'll be doin's to-night," and other new relations of dialogue and business. As a rule, the meaning of a line assists the movement in a play, but if one is on the stage and yet not concerned in the scene, the value of the words spoken does not always help the action.

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I was deeply touched in those days by the thoughtfulness of those about me; the English stage-manager stood for everything that was generous, and I found myself growing most kindly. It is a truth that the temperamental being is more susceptible to the griefs of others when he himself is bruised and beaten. The familiar poor of the London streets who had always distressed me had grown, as a result of my own misery, to be a charge I must assume myself. I hope the other workers who go to and fro over the same path feel as I did about these parishioners. I am quite sure the Duke of Devonshire must be a regular contributor to the neat little blind fellow who stands in the shadow of his great wall month in and month out. He was also on my route, and I once asked him, as I paid my tribute, if he grew to recognize his customers. "Yes, madam," he replied, "I even know their laughs." That was all he had, all the old man had, just other people's laughs, and the lovely foliage of Green Park not a hundred feet away!

I saw a workman who had been discharged from a closed arsenal call out his matches cheerily "two for a penny" and make change in the spring of that year—saw him dwindle

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with the waning summer to a gaunt, stooped wreck of a man whose white cheeks spoke of under-nourishment, and whose voice changed to a beggar's whine, offering no bargains, and keeping what was offered as he paid back Fate in the coin Fate paid him.

I saw what was quite as terrible—a boy who never lost hope. If the man who had passed did not buy, nor the man who was passing, still he who is coming may yet buy; and if to-day is not lucky, yet to-morrow may be, and surely it is luck when the rain holds off, madam.

Then there are the women with the babies, those little white babies who sleep and sleep and sleep, the little drugged, rented babies. It must be difficult to sell matches all day long; it must be difficult to stand through days of drizzle and sell matches; but what must it be to hold the babies, even a thin, rented baby, for twelve hours and sell matches? What must be the weight of those drugged babies? I gave those women pennies, even though they might be quickly turned to gin—and the drugs fed to the children.

There was one girl whom I got to know with a baby all her own. She nourished it, and

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the baby was not drugged, for though it never laughed it often cried. She stood at Charing Cross. I had seen her there at noon and I had seen her there at midnight. She was a pretty girl in the spring when the baby was quite new, but in September she was not so pretty, although the baby had not changed so much—it was but a little larger.

I saw her on the last day of the month as I was walking home from my rehearsal. I had grown very chilly in the theatre, and the rush of heat that always followed was making my head swim by the time I reached Charing Cross. She was shifting the baby from one side to the other, a little awkwardly, as the matches were in one hand; but as she huddled the child up in the hollow of her arm I felt the light weight of its body, just as I knew how the puppy felt when Frederica was hugging it up to her. Only it was a much more wonderful sensation, and it seemed to me just then the cruelest revelation of all the many revelations of that long summer. I didn't feel so sorry for the match-girl that day with her own baby up against her breast. I gave her some money and shook off her thanks; but as I turned to go I hesitated before plunging into the maelstrom, and just

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then a hansom grazed the curb. It passed so close that it swept my gown, and I drew back, throwing up my head in angry protest—and in the hansom were Aaron Adams and my friend Hester!

Instinctively I put my hand before my eyes, as though to brush away any strange hallucination that might have come to my disordered brain when the woman lifted up her child, and in that instant the driver had squeezed his cab through a crevice and was driving toward Cockspur Street. I only heard the sound of a deep, happy laugh which I knew well. It was no figment of my brain, and recklessly, with no fixed idea, I plunged after them. A bobby caught me by the arm while a motor 'bus screeched past, and by the time I had reached the lions of Trafalgar Square there were so many hansoms ahead of me that it was impossible to know which one contained the couple.

On, on I ran, down the slope by the fountains, thinking to avoid the crowd upon the pavement—then around the fountains, with some intention of cutting into Pall Mall in case they might be going to the Carlton—up the steps, realizing this had not been wise, but too late now to remedy—on and still on, with men and women stopping

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to crane their necks, until finally I reached the hostelry only to find the porters standing idly by and no hansom at the door. Then I drove back to the club, as unseeing as the blind man who stands in the shadow of the wall of Devonshire House, and, like him, with the sound in my ears of a deep, happy laugh.

It was five when I left the theatre. At seven the maid brought hot water to my room and asked if she could dress me. I had been sitting at the window staring at the trees out in the park, but I turned to her vacantly.

"Dress me? For what?"

"For going to the play, ma'am."

With that a wave of nausea swept over me, a deep disgust, a wild resentment which shook my body, and, tracing the cause of these sensations, a new horror engulfed me wholly, for my work, my work, at last, was hateful to me!

XII

A FRIEND once told me that she had loved a man—a good man, although he was of common clay and used bad English—until a girl poked fun at him; then he disgusted her. Only always afterward she bore a fierce resentment toward this girl who had made plain, through a few light words of scorn, the weakness in that good man's nature.

Love was to me that night at seven what the ridiculing girl had been to my girl friend. And how I hated it, even while it held me, this power called love! It had spoiled me for my friends and for their homes; it prevented me from forming new acquaintances, because it kept me unreceptive. Nature in all her beauty, to which it was allied, dulled in comparison with it. The breath of the soft wind, the splashing of the rain, the long, level sun-rays on wet grass, the night lights of the city, the church spires rising from the fog—all these delights of old but stabbed me with their sharp appeal

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as I moved on alone, thinking of hours when I had not been alone.

Step by step—fighting—I had yielded to this strange, encroaching force a foothold on my happiness, and when all of it was gone I had not cried out, for I still had my work. Weak as I was in those days, sweating with terror as I played night after night, still the very suffering was my life's portion and I clung to it. It was so mighty, on so high a peak, this play-acting, I had felt that the relentless tide of a great passion for a man who did not care for me never could crawl up to it. Who said "Love will find a way"—and is the sentiment a pleasant one? Well, Love had found a way to reach my work and undermine it as water eats away a cliff; it had grown poor and mean to me, and shrivelled into significance, like a thing ridiculed.

And what had Love given me in fair exchange? Just this: the understanding of the deep sensation of a mother when she heaps her baby up against her breast.

Such wisdom I should once have welcomed. No experience is wasted in our lives, for we can put it in the part we play. It does not matter whether we are there to make the audience

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laugh or cry—it is the breadth we gain with the knowledge of the emotion that we need both in comedy and tragedy. But I was bereft of even this small comfort. I could not make use of my grief, for I had turned against my art, and the vista of long, weary years rose up before me when, like those strollers I had first met in touring companies, I should be compelled to wrest a living from the “grind” of acting.

A voice broke in upon my thoughts—a timid voice. “Beg pardon, madam, but it’s past the half-hour, madam; and the gown and the dinner and the play, madam?”

I looked at the little maid. She must have gone out and come in again. She must have knocked and I must have answered her. Let those who do not understand how actors can speak lines without knowledge of their meaning ask themselves how often they have replied to the routine questions of the day without consciousness of the fact. Servants in England have a lasting patience; there was time for more reflection before I answered her: “Wait, Mary, wait a little.” And she stood waiting quietly.

With my hot head against the cool stone of the balcony my mutinous thoughts ran on. I had been known on the stage as an actress who

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was conscientious as well as capable. That sometimes is an epithet applied to cover gently greater deficiencies, but I had comforted myself with the thought that the real workers in the arts were painstaking also. That night at half-past seven I rebelled against the order of my life when my soul was so perturbed. I understood, at last, the satisfaction of the young woman in a company I was once with when she wired to the theatre that she was ill, and in place of the performance attended a gay dinner. I once knew an actress who tore up her hat, her newest hat, because her photographs were failures. She ever afterward maintained that it had been a great relief, this destroying of her head-gear. Well, I would not tear up my hat or go to a gay dinner, but I would not play that night. I would abandon myself wholly to my misery.

"I am not going to the theatre," I told the waiting maid.

"Thank you," she said, which had its comic side.

The wind was right for it, and above the noise of Piccadilly that old enemy of mine, Big Ben, chanted the three-quarters. I drew in my breath quickly. This was the hour I

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should be starting, or, if very late, hurrying through the dinner with a "taxy" beating at the door. To-night I shifted my position leisurely and looked down into the street. Drivers were miraculously steering in and out through the traffic, messengers were rushing to and fro. Men were sauntering to appointments they were keeping, women flying to meet theirs. It might be no tryst more serious than the solemn British dinner, but the sight would no doubt have afforded Admiral Nelson great satisfaction in the assurance that all England as a unit was intent upon her duty.

All but me. How quickly my hot forehead warmed the stone! I moved to the other side, examining my watch mechanically. What would they say down at the theatre? Would they telephone? and, if they did, what would I say to them? Something flippant, I decided: that the evening was so pleasant or the crowd in Piccadilly so engrossing I really couldn't leave. By that time it would be too late to send and fetch me, so the understudy would go on. Then all through the evening, as I stood by the window looking down, the dressers would be gathering in the hallway off the rooms, and would talk of me, while the players would be forming and re-

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forming little knots in the wings, and they would be passionately sorry, one demanding of the other a brain specialist, as though each kept a specimen in his pocket. But before the play was finished some one—some *one*—would ask if *any* one had known whether she—not steadily, of course—but just a drop—and the first glass leads to more—you know just how it is—and she had been unhappy all the summer—the poor girl!

Yet following on these impious thoughts the hot tears, hotter than my face, poured down over my cheeks, and I was filled with shame that I could attribute such lack of faith to my own people. Still I leaned upon the balcony in mutiny, and tried to quiet a little voice within me—a feeble little voice, of such small proportions that one wonders how it has so absolutely ruled us womenkind.

I looked at my watch again unseeingly. What a thing it is—this instinct that sends us to the theatre! Drunken men feel their way there when the hour comes, women in agonies of pain go unprotestingly when the hour comes, death-beds are left without a plea for pardon, and how dared I stay away? What would they do without me? The understudy—was she

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well prepared, and did she know that there had been some recent changes in the business?—would Bella tell her that the song was out?—should I not 'phone this to her?—what would the audience think, and how long would they hold the curtain for me?—who would announce that I was “ill”?—and would the office send the item to the papers?—and if they did, would Aaron see it in the morning as he sat at breakfast with her?—and would they care, he and his wife, or would they laugh? and—oh, Aaron, you have driven me to this! You have made me scorn my work and break my trust and lose my prestige, but I said I wouldn't go, and I won't go, and—what is that hour Big Ben is striking? Eight—and a *quarter*!—oh, God help me, I shall never make it!—oh, God, let me make it! send me a taximeter, God! And the discipline of years enveloped me and drove me to my work.

They were all on the pavement when I drew up—Amelia and the manager and stage-director; and down in my rooms, while the orchestra was starting on a second overture, my shaking understudy was daubing her face with my grease-paint. She looked up, growing ten years younger at the sight of me, for whatever the secret

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longing of an aspirant to show them just how well she can get through, when the moment comes she prays devoutly for deliverance.

"Plenty of time," called the stage-manager through the thin partition, lying soothingly; "you're not to fret." He had been quite white out on the pavement.

"I'll apologize, please, later," my voice panted back. "It's a long story."

"Don't talk, miss," said Amelia, sternly.

I smiled at her wearily, my hands busied with the jars and pencils. "Amelia, my work isn't the big thing I thought it was. I've found something bigger, but I've found it out too late, and my heart's broken."

"There *is* things bigger," affirmed Amelia, pinning bows to my head.

"Well, why didn't some one tell me long ago?" I querulously answered.

"Didn't no one?" asked the wonderful Amelia.

I went up in my ragged finery, pigeon-toed, bent, a "Zany decked for laughter." I was greeted with a sweep of hand-clapping—it was for me, the actress; then with a roar of mirth as the fine points of my apparel reached them. "A good house," whispered Larry, as I stood

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waiting for the one second that comes in every laugh when it is easiest to quiet down an audience before they are quite through.

"Yes," I whispered back, twisting slightly to see them better. Only I didn't see them, or only two of them—only one of them, perhaps; for, lifting my head, my burning eyes looked into the quiet gaze of Aaron.

He was with Hester in the stage-box, just as the other bridal couples had been who had amused us all through the summer. They, too, were at the back, and as my eyes rested on them she half raised a nervously ungloved hand in greeting; but I saw Aaron cover it with his own and bring it down, just as had the other bridal couples. She was smiling brilliantly, surely; but I could not see whether Aaron's face, too, was aglow with happiness, or, rather, I did not look for it. Wonderfully enough it was sufficient for me to know that he was there, on the other side of the footlights, across the chasm that separates the real world from the make-believe.

When he had passed me in the cab that afternoon it had been as unreal to my tired brain as the quick winking of a biograph. In the silence that had followed Hester's last letter—for I had

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made no reply to the one that brought news of the farm, and she had not written afterward—his very features had grown vague in my mind, their half outlines rising up to torture me, until I felt sometimes that all my love was lavished on a myth. But now he was opposite me once more. Wider than a restaurant table's width was the distance between him and me; but he was there—broad-shouldered, restful, kind, with shrewd, level eyes looking quietly into mine.

And my resentment rolled away. It was just enough for me to have him there. Only—I had ceased to be amazed at the “onlys” in my life—only once upon a time had Aaron been in front, with what zest I should have thrown myself into my part, added laugh to laugh by new antics, made myself doubly ridiculous that he might hear the audience applaud me. My very hideousness would have been a source of triumph to me, a triumph of make-up, which he could not deny, and afterward at supper, in my prettiest gown, I should have slyly fished for some admission that he was proud of me.

Now, as I stood before him in my ugliness and saw Hester sitting by his side fresh and lovely, a little rivulet of shame came creeping up from my

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toes, for I wanted to be pretty; and as the scene went on and the house rocked if I turned my back, showing a bustle, I set my teeth; when I leaped across a brook displaying undarned stockings hot tears came rushing to my eyes; and when I was recalled, that the audience might show their deep appreciation of a scene in which I had been the unsuspecting butt for the whole cast, I could not lift my head to bow to them. The soul of the artist had left me, for I wanted to be lovely and I wanted to be loved. I envied Bella passionately; I envied Frederica, with not a scene to play; I envied all those dance-hall girls, who fiercely envied me.

Throughout the evening I kept my eyes averted from the box, yet Aaron's presence filled the theatre; always before me, whichever way I looked, was the outline of the broad, helpful shoulders, and the strong, warm hands covering Hester's. Twice when I faltered in my lines I turned instinctively to him for help, as though he would surely straighten out the tangled wires in my head. Even in my panic, while the words were being whispered to me by the company, I smiled to myself to think that I should look to Aaron to help me play the acting game.

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They were very gentle with me that night, were my people. The manager put his hand across my mouth when I started to explain, and said: "To-morrow." Larry sent out for the best supper the Savoy grill could furnish when he heard I had not eaten. "There are clams, American ones, old girl," he urged, and I swallowed some for his sake—and Aaron's—remembering the night I had eaten them when we missed "The Rosary," and I had sworn to seize my opportunity and go away.

I heard the finish of a speech of Bruce's as I entered my dressing-room before the last act was called—"the end of her rope" were his words. But none of them knew, except Frederica, just what the end of that rope was, or who were in the box, and how much it meant to me. She had espied the two, and came to me in a rush as I was preparing to go up for the last act.

"I don't care!" she broke in, clamorously. "Rhoda, you show them just how lovely you can be. Take those towels from your waist, put on some rouge, let me do up your hair, and you come on a rearing, tearing beauty." Frederica gulped with sobs and started to pull off my tawdry finery.

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I fought her feebly with my hands. "No, Freddy, no. I've got to see it to a finish. I can't spoil the play."

"Oh, let the old play go to smash. You fix up, darling. How dare they come to stare at you! I'd like to slap her."

Amelia by this time was defending me from further onslaught. "It's all right, Frederica," I gasped back. "It's better this way: I'm happier this way, happier just to have him here. But Bruce is right, I've reached the end. I'll have to give up soon."

"Well, let them know that you're a human being somehow, Rhoda; have a pretend, dear; I won't have you laughed at by that big crowd of men and women when you're such a beauty underneath."

"Have a pretend!" I echoed.

"Yes. Darn art! Read your lines somehow, so as to show them that *you* are back of it."

For an instant I was fascinated. Now that I look calmly at the situation, I know that I never was so strongly of my own fraternity as at the moment when a "make-believe" tempted me to gain my point. I kept on acting even while I scoffed at it. But Aaron rose before me, and his amused contempt for all of us who lived by

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day and night in our play-acting. So I put this means of gaining sympathy out of my life—forever.

“Last act, all up!” shrilled the call-boy, and Frederica, still extravagantly incoherent, yet knowing she had lost, assisted me up-stairs.

Nothing causes us to break more quickly than submitting to the calamity. I played that act as though I were clinging feebly to a rope, the ends fraying in my grasp. It came to me that I was a shipwrecked sailor holding to a life-line; that each word I spoke was a breaker to be breasted; and that the final exit was dry land. All about me was the surging of great waters, trying to suck me down. These noises in my ears were physical and not imaginary, but it was my spent brain that played a part within a part.

A little farther on—a little nearer shore—I found my voice so distant from my body that I was doubtful whether I could be the one who spoke the lines. Still the audience laughed, and I likened them to the great crowd on the beach shouting encouragement, for I knew that the scene was playing properly while they laughed, and on I struggled. Then the waters became turbulent, a great rush of nausea swept

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over me, and another, and another. I wondered, half amused, that one could be so seasick at such a time of peril. Still was heard the laughter of the house, and I did not lose heart that I should make my exit. After this my brain cleared of these fantasies, for the nausea and the surging of waters left me; but a new terror grimly took their place, for I was growing blind. The audience receded first, then the footlights, then the actors; yet still I spoke the lines and heard the laughter. Sightless, I turned in the direction of the door, lifting up my hands to feel my way. A voice—in the wings, I think—exclaimed, “She’s ill,” and at that my knees gave way, and, dog fashion, I came to the floor. There was a quick laugh from the house—I heard it plainly; then a silence, as though they saw, at last, that things were wrong. I had one instinct left: to crawl away, *some* way; but the thought was quicker than the action, for I heard the sound of feet beside me, and as a strong hand touched my shoulder I crumpled into a ball upon the stage. “Why, I am fainting!” passed through my mind.

Then perfect quiet.

XIII

EXTRACT from the London *Daily Comet*,
October 1st:

“Miss Rhoda Miller, who, as Sarah Fall-in-the-Mud, the half-breed Indian, keeps the audience of the Prince’s Theatre in gales of laughter nightly, fell in a faint last evening as she was about to make her final exit. Her heroic efforts to finish her scene provoked the greatest sympathy from the house, and a countryman of hers, who occupied a stage-box, showed his deep concern by stepping across the rail to the stage, and, before those of the company could reach her, lifted her in his arms and carried her to the wings. It was afterward learned that the rescuer was a nephew of Miss Miller’s.”

XIV

NEWSPAPERS did not reach the second floor front of Miss George's Nursing Home. Flowers did, vaguely noticed between long periods of unconsciousness; a doctor and a half a one—possibly the assistant; two nurses in white caps—the one at night, mild and sweet, but the other, during the day, capable and stern. It came to me now and then what a splendid bouncer she would have made in a Bowery restaurant—that day nurse. And once when I made believe—no, I can't use that word again—allowed her to infer it was delirium, I asked her if she had ever served in that capacity. As a punishment I received more of the medicine in the blue bottle the other side the soap-dish, and my mouth was further stopped by the thermometer.

Up to the seventh day no guest stepped beyond the threshold of my door. There would be timid knocks, and a page-boy asking if a lady could come up—which she couldn't—or,

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grown more intrepid, the lady would come to the door itself, and Frederica's voice would say, "Give her these, then, and my love"; or the little, dovelike note of Hester would be pleading—"Just let the gentleman look in"; and the low tone of Aaron would augment her wish by a few deferential words as to the perfect wisdom of the nurse, but "if it could be."

At this I would turn my face to the wall and try not to show how deeply Hester's eager sharing of her husband hurt me. So that the nurse, who was pleased with Aaron's shoulders—as anybody would be, bouncer or no—would look over toward the bed and answer: "I'm sorry, sir, but she is utterly prostrated. She cannot speak a word. It's difficult to understand, for her malaria is disappearing rapidly."

Then they would go away, and I would put the sheet over my head, like a naughty child, whispering to myself: "I can, too, speak, but I just won't! I can, too, speak, but I just won't!"

But that didn't happen until the seventh day, when I was getting better of the chills and fever, yet so far from convalescence that the joy in gripping life again had not touched me with its quick desire. "For what? For what?" I

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would sigh through the night, and through the day kept my lips closed in mute despondency.

On the seventh day the door was opened with informality, and the bouncer, starting to her feet in protest, was confronted by Mrs. Erskine-Waite. "Madam, please do not enter; no one can see Miss Miller."

"I can," retorted Mrs. Erskine-Waite; then turning to my bed: "I do. Rhoda, my child, I just picked up an old newspaper—"

"Oh, was it in the papers?" I asked, eagerly, only my voice had not the firm quality that it once possessed.

"There," said the nurse, tight-lipped, "I knew her silence was hysteria." And she gave me awful pellets from a brown box near the bath-sponge.

But my dear landlady's arms were round me, and she was saying what wild things they were way up in the North of England not to read the papers regularly, and it was only by an accident, while she was teaching Aary to retrieve, that he brought her an old *Comet* with the story staring straight up in her face. And I grew choky at the thought of my dog Aary bringing us together; but when she added, "And he is here—the heart-shaped one? My

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dear, it has come out all right?" the cloud settled down on me again, and Mrs. Waite sighed, saying: "Not yet? Oh, Rhoda, don't waste precious moments!"

By that time I was really too tired to tell her any of the story, or to wonder how she could have known that Aaron was in town, and the next day I had grown mutinous again, for Mrs. Waite opened the door herself upon the inquiring voice of Hester. I heard her give an exclamation of surprise, then step into the hall, closing the door behind her, and for a long, long time the three conversed together. Aaron was earnest, anxious, Hester interspersing dialogue with little shrieks of excitement, and Mrs. Waite talking swiftly and decidedly. The rest of the day she watched me with solicitation and some cunning, only once breaking out, impatiently: "You're better than you think you are; don't fight against your good health, Rhoda."

"Oh, what's the use?" I answered, turning on my pillows.

That was all we said. And when she left that night I feared perhaps she would not come again, and I cried hard; so she kissed me, and was back in the morning miraculously early, very intent in prettying up my pretty room,

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fluffing up my hair, and putting me in my best nightie, despite the protests of the nurse. The bouncer only once relaxed her vigilant attendance, and in that moment Mrs. Waite approached my bed and almost hissed between her teeth: "Ask for a bird—a grilled bird—at one."

"Why?" I queried.

"Because it takes half an hour to cook, and the nurse prepares it."

Any joke upon the day nurse appealed to me, even though I didn't want a bird; so after lengthy opposition it was arranged that Mrs. Waite should be left in attendance, and at twelve-thirty the gray uniform descended into the lower regions. I can't say that the substitute behaved at all becomingly. For the first five minutes she stood out in the hall craning her neck over the stair-rail, and at the end of that period she advanced upon my bed with an unflinching air that showed small consideration for the weakness of an invalid.

"Rhoda," she said, "your heart-shaped picture is on the stairs, and he's coming in. Prepare."

"No!" I cried; but she had gone. I put my hands to my face and wept weakly; some one

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knelt by my bedside, slipped an arm under me, took down my hands with his free one, and kissed me gently.

"No!" I cried again.

"Why not?" said Aaron.

"A husband mustn't kiss me."

"It depends on who is the wife of the husband."

"Not even Hester's husband."

"My child, my child! Oh, god of love, what a mix-up!"—his cheek against my wet one on the pillow.

"Where is she?"

"Doing sentinel duty in the hall."

"Hester?"

"Lord, no. Your dear Mrs. Waite. Hester left for Paris this morning to get her wedding-togs."

"Then you're not yet—"

"Rhoda, we've just half an hour while that bird broils. Don't fight; I've got to have you close to me."

With a dexterity which, naturally, I'd never seen before, he encircled me, covers and all, and I lay in his arms in a big chair, thin and shaky and miserable and happy. I made an effort to protest—it occurred to me a lady would



I LAY IN HIS ARMS IN A BIG CHAIR, THIN AND SHAKY AND
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do this—but oh, the restfulness of those strong arms which held me firm!

“Now, little love, you let me say right here, before we go back further, friend Hester is going to marry Gregory Gaines.”

I turned my face so that he might not see the joy upon it, but it was in the right direction, my lips against his ear. “Who’s he?” I whispered.

“He’s Gregory Gaines; that’s enough now.”

It was quite enough for me, so I lay silent.

“And I wish further to state that I’m the biggest fool that ever tried to corner the love market by strategy — like all of God’s commodities, it can’t be handled that way. Only I wanted you so much — and we clumsy men blunder in these fine manipulations—”

His voice grew husky, and I patted feebly with the hand that clutched his shoulder. “It’s the cable that upset me first,” I whispered. “You refused me.”

“Yes, I did, but—”

“That last phrase, you know, ‘From present situation, realize my condition not as bad as might be,’” I chanted out.

Aaron started. “What did that mean to you?”

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"That you were better off without me."

Then for a moment I was heaped up against him as the matches-selling woman had lifted up her baby. "Oh, my girl, my girl! And I thought I was telling you that at last I believed there was some real chance for me."

We could not laugh at this; a long summer had passed away in sorrow from that one phrase. We clung to each other tightly for a moment, then he went on:

"When your answer came forbidding me to write to you, I supposed that even then you were going out buying up silk petticoats and satin slippers and all those dear, ridiculous things that Hester takes an interest in just now. That was because I, in the serenity of my enormous vanity, was looking for a home for us."

"The farm?"

"Of course, dear. Hester said she told you."

It was awful; but every time that Hester's name was mentioned a great pall settled down upon me. It was the close association of so many hours of bitterness with those six meek little letters. Still, I behaved. "Go on," I said.

"It was hard to keep away from you, but as

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my love was growing every minute, I thought yours would be, too, and—”

“Did you never think that it was cruel to treat me like that, Aaron?”

He hesitated. “I had tried the other way for so long, Rhoda, and to so little purpose. Don’t loathe me.” And I knew I didn’t, although I should. It’s a way we women have.

“Go on some more.”

“I never could have stood it if you had not written Hester. I hung round that family until I felt I ought to pay my board, and with the airiness of an old whale would introduce your name. Wonderful they never tumbled.”

“Too busy whaling.” But this I murmured.

“What is it, dear?”

“Nothing; my feet are cold.”

Aaron saw to that—bed-socks, awful—still, he saw to that.

“I nearly got cold feet myself during the dog-days. That letter I tried to sneak to you under cover of Hester’s handwriting would have shown I was a quitter. I begged you to come home, or to let me come to you—oh, I was in the dust! But you sent it back, and your fierce little spirit gave me the courage to go on.”

My fierce little spirit! Running through the

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streets of London to read his message, and the fresh Amelia posting it! I wriggled up my nose and laughed.

"Oh, my child's giggle once again!" exclaimed Aaron Adams. We stopped talking for a while.

Then, with some courage: "And Hester, Aaron, she wrote as if—"

Here there was more hesitation. "She was at the age, darling, when love was very welcome, and she stood listening for the wings. There wasn't any doubt in her mind who had them on when Gregory Gaines came flapping in with his nice young ones sprouting. She put on hers, and all through August they soared around the country lanes, and never touched the earth until they went to speak to father. Old Charles hasn't much use for these first flights, and in that way Hester turned to me, not having any mother to do her pleading. So I played the go-between, bearing with the old man's grouches, mixing mint-juleps, and finally offering Gregory a partnership, at which my friend turned on me and said he thought he could take care of his own son-in-law without any damned—excuse me—interference. So after that it was all right."

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There were some proprietary pattings here, and a sorry feeling for old Charles, for I could see how the buying of the farm-house had misled him; but that big Aaron never once suspected. With all his craftiness, he was a simple creature.

Pattings over, he went on: "In exchange for Hester's confidences one night, I suddenly unburdened—couldn't help it, dear. The moon was shining—do you recall that harvest moon?" (Oh, that August moon, me, and the composer! I tucked a red face against Aaron's coat.) "I'd been rather proud up to that time, bought the house, of course, and stood all the chaffing that naturally is coming to a bachelor who insists upon a pink brocaded-satin bedroom."

"No, Aaron! Pink—how lovely!"

A beatific state ensued.

"So I told her. Of course, she was delighted. The minute a girl gets engaged she wants her friends to be so, too."

"Yes, I know—there's Frederica."

"No; that big, flopping girl! To whom?"

"A kangaroo."

"Fine—but let me get on; I fear I smell that bird."

"There's ten more minutes," I said, looking

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at the clock. Why does the practical enter into all the delirious moments of a woman's happiness? I had been vigilant of the passing time from the beginning of his—well, to be quite formal, call.

Aaron adopted a disgusted air as he resumed: "Then, my dear, I reached the top notch of foolery, for I let that Hester thing plan all the rest. You see, having captured a tall, skinny lad of twenty-four, she felt herself quite competent to manage every other campaign of the heart. And, girl, I myself was beaten out. I hadn't an idea left. I used to walk over to that empty house and wonder how I ever could corral you and get you into it."

"Oh, Aaron, and you had but to open the door!"

"I thought of that, but that was far too simple for friend Hester. She wanted one of those infernal surprises. I've always hated 'em, and hated people who cook them up, and the greatest surprise of all is that you don't hate me for lending myself to the scheme."

A pause here, but short, as there was not much time.

"So I agreed to come over to England with old Charles and herself. She wouldn't write

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'and tell you her plans at all, and for three weeks those fiends put off their crossing until I stopped speaking to them altogether. The Lord knows, I wasn't much better on the steamer, and when I reached this town I was like a crazy thing. I sneaked off without Hester's knowing and went to the theatre, but they wouldn't give me your address, after that rotten fashion of theirs, so I sent eight tons of flowers around to the stage door and a heart drawn with a red pencil on my card, just to break it gently to you that I was in sight. Said flowers, I may add, eventually reached a fluffy young lady in the Gay Gordons' Company, and provoked some mirth; but this developed afterward. Then I drove around all afternoon with Hester, because they were *your* streets—"

"You almost ran me down."

"My girl!"

A short interruption.

"And ended in a blaze of asininity by sitting with Hester in that box, old Charles too land-sick to go, and you thinking—"

"Thinking you were bride and groom," I finished. "Young English couples don't go to the theatre together. I had forgotten."

"Oh, my British Rhoda!" jeered Aaron.

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"And my plucky Rhoda, playing to the very end! But when you fell, dear, and I stepped over to the stage to pick you up, I saw at last that I had used a bludgeon to win my little love."

"You stepped where!" I exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"Humph—you don't know, then? Me, in the papers," said Aaron, feeling for his press notice and displaying it with pride. But I tore it up, not caring for the aunt allusion. And Aaron laughed, cuddling me up once more. "But oh, my dear heart, it's all over—it's all over, and I shall never let you out of these arms again."

The door was flung open. "Put her back, quick! She's coming!" gasped Mrs. Waite. And in half a minute I was once more out of those arms and flat in bed, with Mrs. Erskine-Waite and Mr. Aaron Adams discreetly talking in the hallway.

"I should think, Mr. Adams," said the bouncer, bearing in the bird, "you could spend a little time with Miss Miller to-morrow."

"Oh, thank you, nurse," replied Mr. Adams. "I shall call at lunch-time."

"Do come," was wafted faintly from the bed.

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That was the beginning of the most glorious convalescence that ever came to a sick girl, made whole again by love and port and quinine, although the bouncer dated my recovery from the eating of the bird. "Once they begin to take an interest in their meals," she told us, "then I begin to pack my things."

At the end of another week I had been moved to Brown's Hotel, the guest of Mrs. Waite. "She really needs more room for flowers," she gave in explanation.

"And more room for callers," she might have added; for each afternoon, as I lay through tea-time in the *chaise-longue* in her private drawing-room, the company dropped in to chat with me. And I watched Aaron sitting there among them, offering tin-foil cigars to Mr. Benny, who tendered great discoveries in exchange, laughing at Bruce's stories of the road or Frederica's imitations of himself bearing away his fainting Indian "aunt," escorting Bella to and from the lift, admiring little knitted invalid affairs that Mrs. Farquhar fashioned for me, and taking them all out in a new motor he had just bought when my nap-hour arrived.

He never ceased to marvel at their kindness to me, and saw no humor in the red tomatoes

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Mr. Benny brought me, though his lips did twitch when Larry let us all infer that *he* would not complain since *she* was going to a better fellow.

"Rhoda," he said, one day, when they had left us, "I know now what you are giving up for me—the comradeship, I mean—the kernel of you all, of which I'd only seen the shell. But, dear girl, don't lose them, keep your old friends about you; I'll make them my friends, too."

I shook my head while I squeezed Aaron's fingers, for I knew I would be no longer of them when I left my work. They would be the ones to leave me, not I them, for the spirit of the stroller is as that of the gypsy, who is accustomed to great distances, to open spaces, to many peoples, yet does not step beyond his band.

But I kissed Aaron in surprise and pleasure, and we had more confidences from day to day, between looking at the samples of soft satin—for I was to be a real bride all in white—and short fittings from modistes who came to me. I told him both of Bunny and of the composer; and Aaron chewed a cigarette, saying: "It's good for me, no doubt; keeps down my vanity."

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And Mrs. Waite told him of herself one day while I was out, returning just as he was stooping reverently to kiss her hand.

The only thing that bothered me in those days was the desertion of my rôle. To be sure, I had written little notes as soon as my hand would let me, asking both the English manager and Mr. Cutting please could I be excused from coming back, as I would like to be a bride, and they had replied wishing me type-written happiness. But I knew that they had tried three Sarahs, and, while the third one had stayed on, I felt a little guilty in quitting without the proper notice; and though I never said it even to Frederica, I often wondered just how they managed to get along without me.

I found out. Aaron had driven me down the night before the wedding, that I might say good-bye to the manager and those I would not see again. He stood by the motor while I went inside the lobby; but the official in the box-office told me that they were "counting up," and would I wait? And I would wait, looking at the pictures of the stars who had had their day and were scarcely memories, until a great laugh from the house billowed out beyond the heavy velvet curtains at the door, and,

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pushing past them, I idled into the auditorium.

She was on the stage, the new half-breed, quite different from me: taller, deeper-voiced, doing things I had not done, reading lines as I had not read them, yet harvesting her laughs with the skill of the woman who knows how. What points she missed that I had made she recovered on new ones, and "they" were laughing just the same—the crowd of men and women who came to be amused.

A low voice startled me. "Not sorry, are you?" and I looked at Junius Cutting—Junius, who had just come over with a brand-new picture of a brand-new baby, and was very strong for domesticity.

I drew in my breath, but answered, with sincerity: "Indeed, I'm not!"

"That's right," he said; "you threw us down, but I wish to the Lord that every girl would do it who can get a husband. There's nothing in this." Another laugh rolled up.

"Not for me, I know," I answered. The laughter swelled. "But as for her"—I looked toward the stage—"that's pretty good. She's playing well, too, isn't she?"

"Oh, she'll do," he nodded, absently. I

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swallowed hard. Then, with an instinctive knowledge of just what I needed, Junius put out his hand. "She can't touch you, my dear."

"She's better," I said, resolutely. "And *that* is all right, too. Good-bye, dear Junius Cutting."

In this manner my stage career was closed.

XV

EVERY girl's wedding is the most beautiful of all others, but I think mine was *really* the most beautiful. In the first place, not every one can have Amelia dress her, or engage an old commissionnaire, with an extra medal acquired that summer, to announce the names—or marry Aaron Adams, for that matter. It was no trouble for the stage doorman to call us out correctly, as only the members of the company were present—and Frederica's kangaroo man. Sir William and Mrs. Waite did not count, being the host and hostess, and of course Hester and old Charles Bateman were there. Old Charles came in with Aaron, looking very brave, as though it were the mating he would have most desired.

I had no attendants, for I had been torn between choosing Frederica or politely asking Hester, and, while I longed for both, that would have been slighting Bella, and if all three of them were chosen that would have left so few

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guests outside the flower-chancel that they would have been quite lonely. So I had only my dog Aary, which Sir William had brought down.

We had not counted on Aary being an attendant, but by great industry he had chewed through his leash and rode all the way across the drawing-room on my nice satin train. Mrs. Waite laughed aloud at this—a short laugh, however—explaining afterward that it had come to her just then, for the first time, why I had named the puppy Aary. The contemplation of her obtuseness kept her happy through the ceremony, she asserted, so she wasn't sorry.

And old Charles Bateman said that he was glad he had not been alone in taking the occasion as one of some festivity. This was directed fiercely at the rest of us, for as soon as the clergyman had opened up his prayer-book the company all began to cry, poor Aaron slipping me his handkerchief with the ring. Yes, I cried, too. I didn't feel much like it, but I didn't want my dear fraternity to think that I had ceased to be unlike them just because I was getting married to a broker.

To be sure, as soon as the service was over, and I had kissed every soul in the room, and

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Aaron all the girls, we were laughing again and giving imitations of ourselves crying—all except Larry, who managed to keep gloomy until we were past the Chablis at breakfast. Then he brightened up, and promised to come to all my week-end parties and tell me truthfully of “her.”

Speeches were made—fearful ones, for actors don’t manage their own lines as well as other people’s—and toasts were drunk, Aaron proposing a bumper “to the world of make-believe, where weary mortals find their lost illusions,” which we all drank standing, feeling very much excited and united. But it was a simple breakfast, and we talked “shop” all through it, Mr. Benny telling the “divine” why clergymen were always funny on the stage—“because they wuz so true to life”—and Bella advising old Charles Bateman to put green around his eyes if he wanted brilliancy, although he said he didn’t, and other pleasant happenings.

When I came back from putting on my motor-gown, for we were to do a little touring before going home, they were gathered around the piano singing to Bella’s playing—old Charles, Sir William, the commissionnaire (discreetly in the rear), and all. Aaron and I

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sang with them, too, for a while, but I caught the sudden throb of an engine in quiet Albe-marle Street, Mrs. Waite looked at me meaningly, and Aaron touched me on the hand, nodding toward the half-open door to which the company's backs were turned.

The dreaded moment when I must say good-bye had come. How could I manage it?—how would they stand it? And then Bella's clear voice broke into the "Birthday Song," and they crowded close around her, leaving Aaron and me on the edge—leaving Aaron and me a little out of it.

"'My heart is gladder than all these,'"

sang Bella.

"'Because my love is come to me,'"

rang out Larry's charming tenor.

"'Is come—is come to me,'"

chorused the others.

Mrs. Waite beckoned at the door. I started to lay my hand on Frederica's shoulder, but Aaron drew me from her. Out in the corridor

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I once more protested; but the voices, chiming all together now, seemed independent of us.

“‘The birthday of my life is come,
Is come—is come to me,’”

sang the players.

I turned to Aaron. “Oh, my dear, big love, they are *my people!*”

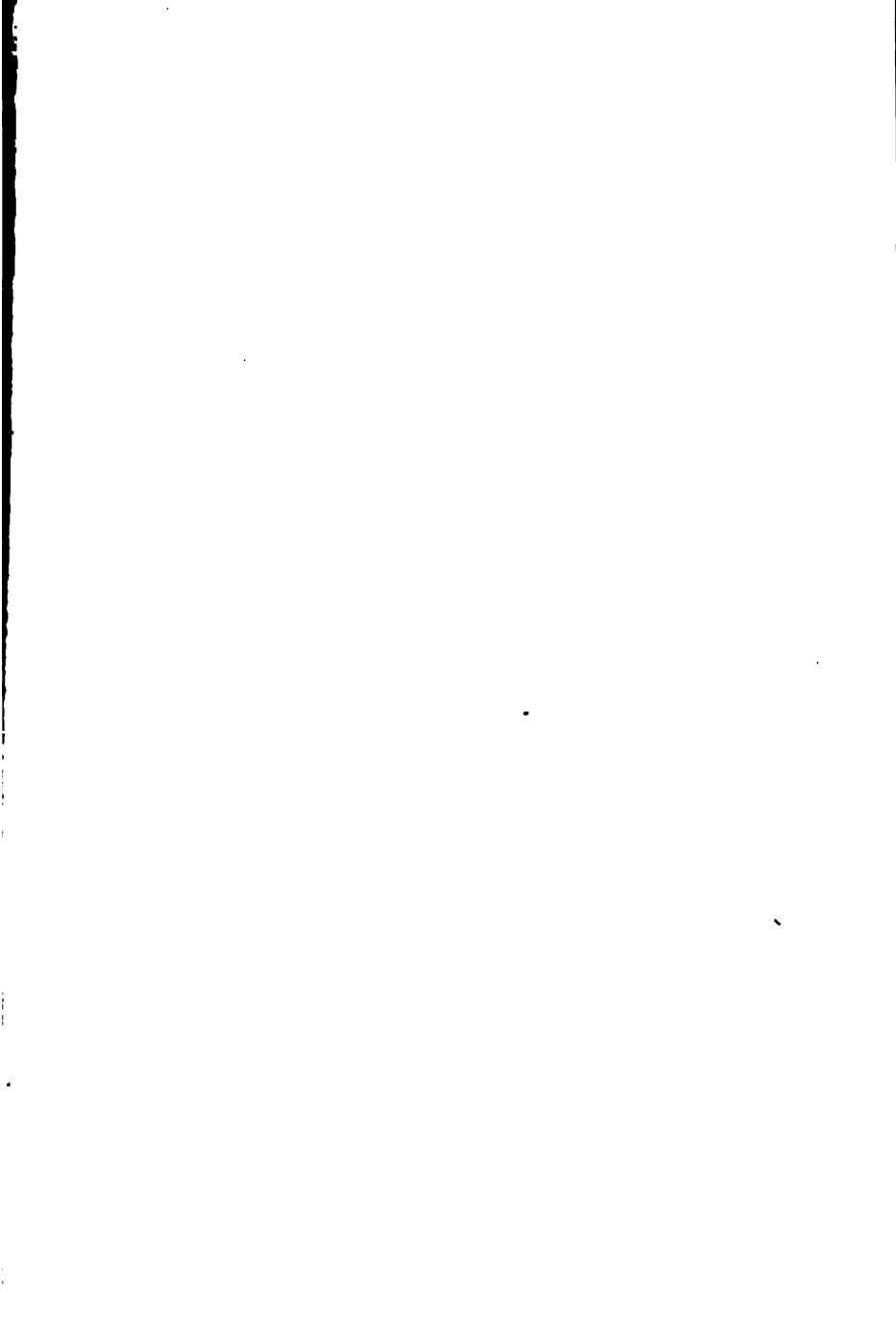
“Yes,” said Aaron, “but it is *our birthday!*”

I put my hand in his, and we went on.

As the door of the motor closed upon us the refrain floated out through the drawing-room windows, but I leaned back against the cushions with a nod of restored happiness to my perfectly new husband.

“Anyway, I had music on my exit,” said Mrs. Aaron Adams.

THE END



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